

Honor

by ShadowBloodNinja

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Summary: Tsuyuki knew the dangers of the world, being one of few female warriors. She knew that as soon as she found herself in Kyoto, cutting down an inhuman creature, that things were about to get ugly. She just hoped that she'd be able to keep Chizuru alive, especially when old figures that Tsuyuki had hoped died return. And who was this indigo haired man that challenged her?

## 1. Guard

\*\*\_Honor\_\*\*

\_Chapter 1\_

\_The Girl's Guard\_

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><p><em>Summary- <em>Tsuyuki knew the dangers of the world, being one of few female warriors. She knew that as soon as she found herself in Kyoto, cutting down an inhuman creature, that things were about to get ugly. She just hoped that she'd be able to keep Chizuru alive, especially when old figures that Tsuyuki had hoped died return. And who was this indigo haired man that challenged her at every step?

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><p>Long brown hair was swishing back and forth from a high ponytail that was tied with a pale ribbon. A determined feminine face stared into the dark streets of Kyoto and chocolate doe eyes tinged with innocence tried to look intimidating.<p>

"Chizuru-san, we'd best not dawdle. You and I do not intimidate larger men." the girl's companion demurred softly. Her companion was taller than Chizuru by almost a head, and was much paler and more

exotic. Her face was thinner than Chizuru's heart shaped face and her eyes narrow yet larger than Chizuru's. Her worn yukata hid her womanly figure as she took short strides so that her long legs would not outdo the pace of Chizuru. Long silver hair cascaded down her back and bangs draped down her face in messy strands. Across her forehead was a black headband that covered her ears before being tied in a tight knot behind her head. Crimson eyes were obscured by the bangs and left in the shadows, appearing almost rust colored in the dark. But as soon as she heard noise and she looked back, her bangs flew up and the moonlight hit her pale face, her eyes seemed to glow like fire. A thin scar raked across her nose, and a longer scar raced across her cheek and up across the bridge of her nose to end above her other eye.

"Tsuyuki-kun, you're a master of your skill. You could take the worst opponent." Chizuru threw back, giggling slightly. Tsuyuki gave a small smirk.

"You're too dainty and feminine to be under the guise of a man, Chizuru-san. Men do not giggle. And your features aren't sharp like mine." Tsuyuki lightly, yet seriously, pointed out. Chizuru shrugged, giving a small smile back.

\_Thwack. Crack.\_

"Uwaaagh!" a pained cry came from the alley they were about to turn into. Tsuyuki took a guarded stance, her hand twitching towards the two katanas that decorated each hip. Her eyes narrowed at the silence, and she stilled when she turned around the corner. Blood decorated the wooden walls and rested in puddles in the dirt. A figure with white hair and a blue yukata was crouched over what had most likely been a ronin prowling the streets. Another white haired figure had another struggling ronin by the throat against the wall. Light glinted off a sword in the second white haired figures hand, and with a sickening squelch and a splatter of blood, the ronin was dead. But the figure kept carving into the body, and in short time blood stained the area. This was the same fate the previous ronin had met.

"Ehehehehehehehe." a crazed voice laughed, and Tsuyuki hardly had time to withdraw her own blade and block the first white haired figure that had noticed her when she had been transfixed with the second figure. Tsuyuki gripped her second blade and plunged it into the chest of the figure. She gasped when the figure only laughed back at her.

"Blood!" it howled, reaching for her. Growling in annoyance, Tsuyuki kicked out, and the figure was thrown off her blade and into the wall with a loud thump. Tsuyuki sliced through its body this time, severing its torso from its abdomen. Chizuru threw her hands over her mouth, gagging. Tsuyuki showed no discomfort as sticky crimson blood covered her, and she turned to block the other oncoming figure when there was a flash of a clean blade. The figure howled in pain and blood covered the ground once again before the figure collapsed.

A new figure stood before Tsuyuki, who was crouched in a guarded defensive position. The man's long dark hair was almost as long as Tsuyuki's, and the same blue coat that the two fallen figures wore garbed the new man. He turned, purple eyes meeting Tsuyuki. Then he swung his blade at her. A second and third figure appeared from the

shadows, both flashes of blue like the dark haired man.

"Chizuru, get out of here!" barked Tsuyuki as she managed to block the three blades aimed at her, the heat of the moment making Tsuyuki forget the honorific in Chizuru's name.

"Stop him!" ordered the dark haired male as he ducked down and tried to get another swing at Tsuyuki. Tsuyuki jumped over his blade, blocked the oncoming blade from a second figure as a flash of blue easily caught Chizuru and pushed her against the wall.

"Stop!" ordered the black haired man after a small hint of realization and surprise flashed across his face before his expression became guarded again. The two men disengaged from Tsuyuki, who crouched back down and took her guarded stance once again. She regarded the men coolly.

She now had the chance to appraise the other two men. Holding Chizuru against the wall was a man with deep blue eyes, a void, serious expression and dark indigo hair. Between the black haired man and indigo haired man was a brunette. His face held a cool look as he appraised Tsuyuki with his forest green eyes.

"Don't move and we won't hurt your friend." coldly called the indigo haired man.

"We have to kill them anyway," the brunette flippantly demurred, "They've seen too much."

"It seems luck is not with you tonight." the black haired man sighed, "Release the boy, Saito." The indigo haired man, Saito, did as told. However the look that crossed his face told Chizuru that if she ran, she would be dealt with. And she doubted Tsuyuki would save her from these men.

"If they have this sort of reaction to blood, then they don't seem like they'll be practical." Saito nodded towards the fallen white figures. Tsuyuki had figured they were related to each other due to the blue jackets, this confirmed her suspicions.

"Damn. I didn't think they were this bad." the black haired man sighed before regarding the bodies with an emotionless mask.

"What will we do with these two, commander?" Saito questioned of the black haired man, gesturing with his sword towards Tsuyuki and nodding towards Chizuru.

"Drop the commander. We're supposed to keep a low profile." the black haired man told Saito. The brown haired man laughed.

"Our blues give it away I think." snickered the brown haired man. Tsuyuki's eyes widened slightly before she composed herself. So these men were a part of the group that she had been hearing about. Word was that a group of men garbed in blue wandered the streets and cut people down.

"What should we do with the bodies?" questioned Saito blandly.

"Just take the blues. Yamazaki can take the rest." the black haired man waved it off.

"As you wish." politely replied Saito.

"Another man cut down in the street, huh? Doing a great job, aren't we Hijikata?" the brown haired man said, looking somewhat serious. His tone was flippant, but his eyes showed trouble.

"So long as we keep our mouths shut, I don't think anyone will connect us with this." sniffed Hijikata, the black haired man. Hijikata eyed Chizuru and Tsuyuki. Both girls knew that the words weren't for his companions.

"Murder is common in Kyoto, the city is dangerous," Tsuyuki reasoned, "We won't say a word about this event. And no one will know we've seen anything tonight. This could have never happened."

"We can't just take your word for it. Nothing will compel you to keep this secret after you leave us, should you be tortured for information you don't have the strength or will to not speak of it." Hijikata coldly denied, and Tsuyuki scowled at him darkly.

"You don't know my story, nor do I know yours. Do not make judgment on my character. You do not know what I've seen, done, and have been subjected to." seethed Tsuyuki, anger emanating from her for a brief moment. Killing intent rose in the air, but she calmed just as quickly as she had angered. She took a deep breath, and sheathed her swords before her calm crimson eyes landed on Hijikata, waiting for a response.

"We saved you, didn't we? Aren't you going to thank us?" the brunette smoothly questioned, his posture showing he was smug.

"I handled the first; the second would have fallen to my blade just as easily. I have no reason to thank you, kodomo." The man bristled at Tsuyuki's insult.

"You two are the children here. Neither of you look older than any of us." Hijikata smoothly cut in, eyes dangerous.

"I'm very sorry for he-his ignorance, we're just a bit confused and unsettled." stuttered Chizuru, attempting to calm everyone. The brown haired man looked at her lazily.

"At least one kid knows how to be polite. I'm Okita Souji." The brunette introduced himself.

"What the hell do you think you're you doing, Souji?" harshly questioned Hijikata.

"I understand your concern commander, but we must move." interrupted Saito, speaking with urgency and seriousness. Hijikata nodded, and Okita grabbed the wrist of Chizuru gently, giving her a slightly reassuring smile. Hijikata nodded at Saito again, and Saito went to grab Tsuyuki's wrist.

"You may lead me, but you may not touch me, kodomo." Tsuyuki almost snarled, withdrawing her arms but letting them linger near her swords. Saito eyed her swords, as if debating taking them away. Tsuyuki didn't let her lips curl up in a smug grin. Her swords were her obvious weapons. The long black staff, resembling a stick with a

cracked orb on the top, always went unnoticed.

Chizuru's eyes were flitting back and forth between Hijikata and Okita. Okita's grip was far too tight to be friendly, but was not rough. There was no question on their situation.

"It would be best if you prepared for the worst. I doubt this will end well for you." Saito warned suddenly. Chizuru choked on air, and Tsuyuki tensed. She had looked as if she was about to grab for her sword when Saito whacked her upside the head and she fell to the ground, unconscious. Then he picked her up and threw her over his shoulder. Chizuru nervously looked at Okita and he gave her a reassuring smile before everything went black for her as well.

\_0o0o0o0o0o\_The\_Next\_Morning\_0o0o0o0o0o0\_

Crimson eyes opened slowly. Tsuyuki's head pounded and she slowly sat up, her eyes getting used to the light in the room. She looked down at herself when her hands couldn't move. She was bound tightly; her hands were bound together behind her back as well as her ankles. Rope was tied a few times around her upper arm and torso, and again around her thighs.

"Tied me up good, and my swordsâ€¦" Tsuyuki stared wistfully at where her swords had once been attached to her hips. She wiggled around to feel if her staff was on her back. She frowned when she didn't feel it. Looking around the room led to her finding Chizuru on a futon across the room, and her staff was leaned against the wall by the door. Chizuru looked much less tied up than Tsuyuki, and Tsuyuki assumed that she looked to be more of a threat than Chizuru.

"Hm?" Tsuyuki looked to the door as it slid open and a kind faced man stepped into the room.

"I see you've woken up." he observed placidly before introducing himself as Inoue.

"I'm sorry we have to treat you this wayâ€¦ hold on a moment. I'll loosen the ropes, all right?" As Inoue removed Tsuyuki's ropes Chizuru began to awake with a groan. Inoue went over to assist her with her fewer bonds as Tsuyuki frowned at her still bound wrists. She eyed the sword at Inoue's hip.

"Thank you." Chizuru bowed politely to Inoue who let out a short laugh. He asked for the two to follow, and they did as asked. He led them through the courtyard hallway.

"They've been debating since morning what to do with you two. For now, they've decided to hear what exactly you saw last night." Inoue informed them as they walked. Tsuyuki observed Inoue more and she realized that while he was a jovial man, if either she or Chizuru tried to run, he'd kill them. Inoue eyed Tsuyuki and winked at her.

"You have no need to worry, they all seem scary but they're nice." Inoue assured the two girls. Tsuyuki frowned. She had heard rumors of the vicious Shinsengumi. When reaching their destination after receiving a description of all the people they were meeting, all eyes of the Shinsengumi leaders tore into Tsuyuki, who proudly walked in

with her head held high. She stood before them, not falling under their gazes. She met each gaze, holding the gazes of Saito, Okita and Hijikata longer than those of the members she had not yet met. Behind her Chizuru peeked around, freezing at all the attention before blushing and looked down at her feet.

"Good morning. I hope you slept well?" Okita brightly asked.

"Slept is not the term I would use. Forcefully knocked out is the term I would use." retorted Tsuyuki. Chizuru flailed slightly behind Tsuyuki at her insolence.

"I apologize for his insolence, Okita-san! We slept well." cried Chizuru before meekly whispering, "Although it wasn't particularly comfortable."

"Really, because when I took a look at you earlier, you didn't budge no matter what I poked." Okita's smile widened into a grin as Chizuru's face turned red. Tsuyuki looked between Chizuru and Okita, debating if he was lying or not.

"He's only teasing you. Souji didn't go anywhere near your room." Saito assured them in a monotone as he rolled his eyes. Chizuru's wide eyes stared intently at Okita, whose grin was still wide.

"Aah, I just wanted to see you squirm a little." laughed Okita before looking to Saito, "Not very nice of you, Hajime, calling me out like that."

"I don't think Saito-san did anything wrong. You, on the other hand" Chizuru pouted. Hijikata, who had been watching the back and forth, rolled his eyes.

"Shut it, you sound like a bunch of kids." At Hijikata's voice, no further insubordination occurred. Okita shrugged at him, but his eyes still glowed with a smile.

"So Hijikata" this is your witness?" questioned a younger man's voice. Tsuyuki's eyes left Souji, and landed on three men. Well, what looked to be two men and a boy. The one who spoke was the boy. He had brown hair almost as long as Hijikata's and bright teal eyes.

"They're both real sticks, huh? Just kids." the boy commented. This boy appeared to be Toudou Heisuke, the youngest captain. His youth showed.

"You're calling him a kid, Heisuke? That's rich." snickered a darker brunette with a green cloth tied across his head. Blue eyes showed amusement, however the rest of his body did not. He was a large man, this was Nagakura Shinpachi.

"You three all look like kids." the red haired man across from Heisuke chuckled. However he looked very serious. Apparently, those three were most immature.

"Leave off, you grumpy old bastards." huffed Heisuke.

"The hell I will, boy! You think you can get away with talking to us like that?!" loudly retorted Shinpachi.

"Besides," the red head, Harada Sanosuke, snickered, "I'm hardly mature enough to be called 'old'. Shinpachi, maybe, butâ€¦ not me."

"You son of a bitchâ€¦ I thought we were friends!" Shinpachi cried.

"Hahahaha! C'mon, Shin! Would an adult get so worked up over something like this?" Heisuke teased. They continued to go back and forth, and Tsuyuki had the feeling that this banter was usual behavior for them. But she did note the inquisitive glances in their direction.

"I apologize for all this behavior. Please, don't give them the pleasure of unsettling you." a rather plain man told them calmly. He was rather friendly.

"Are you serious?" Hijikata began with a smirk, "You're the scariest out of all of us, Sanan." All the men nodded in agreement. Tsuyuki looked the man over again, looks were deceiving. Chizuru however disbelieved it, this man seemed perfectly nice.

"Oh? How crude. I can understand their feelings, but that our demon of a commander should think soâ€¦" Sanan responded, smiling. Hijikata smirked back at him.

"You're lucky to have a friend like Sanan, Toshi." a jovial man told them cheerfully. The man looked to them, smiling.

"My apologies for not introducing myself. I am Isami Kondou, Chief of the Shinsengumi." the jovial man greeted Tsuyuk and Chizuru, "Toshi over there is the commander, and Sanan is our colonel." A deep sigh turned attention to Hijikata, whose purple eyes were closed in slight annoyance.

"Ahâ€¦ Kondou? Why are you telling them all this?" questioned Hijikata.

"Uhâ€¦ Why, do you think it's a bad idea?" Kondou asked brightly.

"Well, unless you really think these kids need to know all our secrets, maybe you should really keep your mouth shut." Shinpachi pointed out, his demeanor serious.

"Exactly! Why bother anyway. We don't owe these kids anything." Heisuke said with a nod, crossing his arms. Harada glanced over at Kondou and laughed.

"True, but it's not like telling them will hurt us." Harada demurred, and Kondou perked up at these words.

"Well, let's get back to business. Can you run through what happened last night?" Kondou questioned, sheepish look turning to business. He looked to Saito, who nodded.

"Last night we were on patrol when we encountered a fight amongst those two and two of our men. Two ronin were dead before we arrived, killed by our two men and revealing their failure. We engaged the

white haired kid, believing him to be one of our own men due to his appearance." Saito reported before turning to Tsuyuki and Chizuru.

"They attacked, I defended." Tsuyuki told him, looking Saito in the eyes.

"We didn't mean to see anything." cried Chizuru. Hijikata softened at Chizuru's outburst, and Okita's smile didn't change. Saito didn't spare Chizuru a glance, eyes locked with Tsuyuki.

"You didn't mean to," Shinpachi looked to Chizuru with a troubled look, "But you did."

"You saw everything before they attacked you, the whole ugly business." Harada stated, looking pensive.

"Um, no, we got there and there were bodies and they attacked us." Chizuru began.

"But you saw it. You have an honest heart, which isn't a bad thing butâ€¦" Harada trailed off.

"We won't tell anyone. Neither of us originates from Kyoto, nor do we care about the plans of the Shinsengumi. We'll be leaving in a few days, and no one will know we encountered anything with the Shinsengumi." Tsuyuki spoke up, looking away from Saito and eyeing Harada.

"It seems unlikely this attack was mere chance. Then again, I have no reason to think you're an enemy either." Sanan told everyone, "Even if you do not intend to tell anyone, you could be captured; interrogated. You two don't look as if you could withstand torture. You don't know who could have overheard or witnessed the attack from the shadows."

"You do not know either of us, do not speak as if you know what we've been through." growled Tsuyuki. Hijikata gave a warning look to Sanan, who dropped that subject. Chizuru whimpered from beside Tsuyuki.

"It's easy enough to stay quiet, but if someone should try toâ€¦| coerce you, you've no reason to keep our secrets." Saito pointed out.

"We don't have any guarantee you'll keep your word. it wouldn't be smart to just let you go." Okita added.

"You think I have no honor?" spat Tsuyuki, "Should I give my word I keep it, kodomo." Chizuru winced as annoyance spread across Okita's face.

"You don't look to be anyone's senior. Even Heisuke looks to be older than you." Shinpachi crowed, Heisuke sputtering somewhat at him in the background.

"We have no guarantee on your honor, either. Let's just kill these kids. You want to keep someone quiet, that's the only sure way." Okita's face looked serious, but searching his eyes Tsuyuki saw the slightest lightness of joking.



"B-but-" Chizuru began, and Tsuyuki threw a hand over her mouth to silence her sputtering panic. Chizuru gave a despairing look to Kondou, who admittedly seemed the nicest in the room.

"Don't be so cold, Souji," Kondou scolded, "What do we gain by murdering civilians?" Okita's smile dropped and he looked to the floor.

"Oh, don't give me that look. I was just kidding." Okita demurred.

"Then perhaps it should have sounded like it." Saito chided briskly. Okita gave a derisive snort and looked at the wall, attempting to hide his red face.

"Surely there must be something we can do? We're talking about two childrenâ€¦" Inoue began worriedly.

"I've no wish to kill him either, but we can't discount the chance that they could reveal information about us." Sanan added before looking to Hijikata, "I'd like to hear the commander's opinion."

"Last night, men who broke the code were killed and we mistook the white haired kid as one of our own men due to his looks. The kids were at the wrong place at the wrong time." Hijikata sighed, looking around the room at his men.

"And I imagine that's all there is to say?" Sanan inquired.

"Well, I doubt they understand what they've seen." Hijikata shrugged.

"Even so, this is serious. We have bigger things to think about. This has to be kept under wraps." Shinpachi argued, "If rumor gets out that the soldiers of the Shinsengumi are thirsty for blood, that would be problematic."

"I think Souji has a pointâ€¦ Still, I'll do whatever Hijikata and Kondou tell me to." Harada spoke up as grim looks were exchanged.

"I think we oughta let them go." Heisuke put in his vote, looking troubled, "It's not like they know why those men went nuts, you know?" Immediately after saying that, Tsuyuki's thoughts began to whirl, and Chizuru looked disheartened as her mind also began to think at what he meant by that. Hijikata watched Chizuru's eyes widen before he looked to Heisuke.

"Shut it Heisuke." he ordered, Heisuke immediately clapping his hands over his mouth with an apologetic expression.

"Well, this is going to make it even harder for us to just let you go." Okita chimed in, his grin back. Chizuru whimpered again, and Tsuyuki scowled at them.

"We have no use for your secrets." she snarled.

"A man should always be ready to face death. You two should make peace with yours." Shinpachi spoke up. Chizuru shared a look with

Tsuyuki, whose anger was replaced with a slightly amused smirk.

"I've faced death many times, but I will not accept a death outside of battle. I will not accept a meaningless death." Tsuyuki told him.

"Very true," Harada agreed with Shinpachi, "A brave death is always an option. When I was young, I committed honorable suicide." Shinpachi grinned over at Harada.

"Although it didn't really stick, did it Sano?" Both broke into raucous laughter at their barbaric jokes. Tsuyuki, whose humor was morbid, cracked a small smirk at their joke. Saito ignored them, his eyes focused on Tsuyuki and Chizuru.

"Hijikata-san, since we can't seem to reach a consensus can I send them back to their room?" Saito questioned Hijikata before turning to Chizuru and Tsuyuki, "Should you hear something you shouldn't while you're here then we'll have no choice but to kill you." Chizuru gasped, hands flying to her ears in realization. Tsuyuki merely eyed Chizuru with slight amusement.

"True. Can you take care of them?" Hijikata flippantly questioned Saito before returning to the low murmuring that he had been doing with Kondou and Sanan. Saito nodded and moved towards Chizuru and Tsuyuki.

"I agree, there are too many careless men here." Sanan concurred, eyeing Shinpachi, Heisuke and Harada.

"C'mon, Sanan. What're you looking at me for?" Shinpachi whined.

"That oughta be pretty obvious. We're in charge of being careless. Especially you, Heisuke." Harada demurred in acceptance, turning his head to leer at Heisuke in wait of Heisuke's response.

"H-hey! Back off!" Heisuke sputtered, "It was just a mistake, all right?" His voice rose before he turned to Chizuru and Tsuyuki.

"Iâ€¦ I'm sorry." he mumbled so low that only the two of them could hear. Chizuru looked to Tsuyuki, who simply nodded at him. No fear shone in her eyes, they revealed nothing but emptiness.

"Shall we go?" Saito questioned. Tsuyuki nodded, and Chizuru mumbled a polite yet startled yes to him. He led them to their rooms before shoving them into their room roughly. Chizuru fell to the ground with a cry and Tsuyuki bounced on her heels, landing in a defensive position that would have been more impressive had her hands not been bound. Saito looked at them with a serious expression, the light outlining him and casting a shadow over his face.

"For your own sakes, you should imagine the worst. Things are unlikely to go well." Saito told them in his usual, monotonous deep voice. Chizuru grit her teeth, looking between crying and pissing herself. Tsuyuki met Saito's eyes with her own confident gaze. Tsuyuki stood next to her staff, prepared to grab it should Saito attempt to attack. Saito said nothing else, instead closing the door.

Tsuyuki listened for his footsteps, counting them as he walked. She took note that he hadn't walked far enough, he was most likely there to guard them.

"Tsuyuki-kun, what will we do?" Chizuru questioned as she straightened herself to sit properly. Tsuyuki pulled her staff from the wall and placed it across her lap as she knelt beside Chizuru.

"I've gathered a few things from their conversation, Chizuru-san." Tsuyuki's voice dropped to a whisper, and she watched and listened to hear if Saito attempted to move closer to hear. When she didn't hear movement, she continued in her low murmur, assuming he hadn't heard her speak at all.

"They believe we're men, as humorous as that is considering I have a very feminine body and they carried us here, and you look like a female even in your disguise, we may be able to find sympathy in those who oppose our deaths. They wouldn't want to kill a woman, it's not honorable. We also may attempt to explain our situation, if they hear why we're in Kyoto and what we are doing here, they may let us leave, or they may possibly know something." explained Tsuyuki. She heard several pairs of footsteps coming towards them, and she looked at Chizuru.

"Trust in me," Tsuyuki whispered before calling out, "Excuse me! Is anyone there?" Tsuyuki figured it best not to tell them she knew they were there, as that would give away one of her abilities. Tsuyuki heard Saito stand and the others enter.

"Well, you've got some balls. I'll give you that. We've got you locked up, but that doesn't stop you calling for us." laughed Shinpachi, grinning at Tsuyuki. Chizuru found his laughter, and slightly impressed look, to be a good sign.

"Have you made up your mind about dying?" Shinpachi questioned in good nature.

"We wish for you to hear us out." Tsuyuki told them. Saito looked to her.

"It is unlikely that we can sympathize with your situation. So long as you understand that, say what you wish." Chizuru winced as his harsh tongue. Tsuyuki didn't look any less troubled. Chizuru felt any possible courage she had flee her body when Tsuyuki looked to her.

"I sympathize with your awful luck. May you rest in peace." Harada snickered.

"A man should know when to accept his fate." agreed Heisuke. Tsuyuki ignored how they spoke, as if their fates were already decided for them. Chizuru was disheartened by them, and she nearly fell over when Tsuyuki gave her a supportive look.

"Well, Chizuru-san, what do you say? Do we tell them why we've come to Kyoto, what they've mistaken about us, or should we just accept our fate?" Tsuyuki's tone was somewhat amused, and Chizuru sputtered a bit before Tsuyuki turned to them.

"We're looking for someone, unfortunately we only arrived here yesterday afternoon." Tsuyuki began, facing Saito. Saito tilted his head and narrowed his eyes. Tsuyuki grinned at him; a terrifying sight realized the other men. They took note that Chizuru looked disturbed at Tsuyuki's grin, "Ah, have you figured out what you've mistaken us for?"

"Then you two are merely nothing more than two girls looking for someone to help you?" he tilted his head as he asked.

"Yeah, well, Kyoto's not that safe at night for somebody to wander around even with someone else-wait! What!? \_Girl\_?" Shinpachi looked absolutely flabbergasted as his mouth hung slightly open and his eyes widened comically.

"You figured it out?" Chizuru asked, resembling Shinpachi's surprise.

"It wasn't difficult," Saito informed her, "With you, you dress like a man but your features aren't sharp and you act like a girl. With your friend, I carried her back. I assumed that she was just strangely proportioned, and her features aren't Japanese, they're foreign. But her eyes are distinctly feminine, as are her lips and nose."

"Now that you mention it, you did seem kinda girly." Heisuke said to Chizuru, looking her over again. He looked over Tsuyuki before nodding at her, "She's a lot scarier. So I wouldn't have even questioned her."

"Admitting a girl's scaring you, Heisuke?" Harada teased. Heisuke turned to yell at him, and Chizuru looked to the still stunned Shinpachi.

"Struck dumb, eh Shinpachi?" Harada jibbed at Shinpachi, ignoring Heisuke's indignant cries, "Well, makes sense I suppose. You don't exactly have a lot of experience with ladies." Shinpachi when to reply, but Saito cut him off.

"Let's go find Hijikata. We'll listen to you when everyone is together." Saito told the two girls before nodding at Tsuyuki, who smirked in return. A few minutes later, everyone was back in the previous meeting room. This time, Tsuyuki's staff was back on her person, snugly attached to her back where it belonged.

"So, what have you gathered us here for, Saito?" Kondou questioned politely. Saito nodded towards the girls.

"They have a few things they neglected to inform us of." Saito replied, gesturing to Tsuyuki to begin speaking. Tsuyuki eyed the commanders.

"My name is Tsuyuki, and this is my charge, Chizuru-san. We have been traveling looking for Chizuru-san's father. We have come from Edo. He left a few months ago, and was sending letters to Chizuru-san every day. However, a few days before he was due to return, the letters stopped coming. Chizuru-san waited before coming to me and asking me to guard her as she searched for her father in Kyoto. We arrived yesterday afternoon and were looking for an inn when we were involved with you. Chizuru-san's father is a doctor, and he had no protection

while traveling so we are slightly worried there is no trace of him." explained Tsuyuki.

"You forgot a part of your explanation." Saito demurred, a serious glint in his eyes. Tsuyuki gave her wolfish, unsettling grin.

"At first glance, you all assumed us to be men. Chizuru and I are females, however as females traditionally do not carry swords and normally do not travel alone, we traveled under the guise of men." There was a stunned silence.

"Dude, you're a girl?" Okita, looking beyond surprised, yelped. His undignified cry caused him to look away to hide his embarrassment. He looked around, smugly smirking when no one noticed his yelp other than Tsuyuki and Chizuru.

"Once you know they're girls they don't look like boys at all, do they?" Heisuke asked with a grin. Kondou, meanwhile, was having issues processing the idea.

"Girl!? I Isami Kondou, have commit a grave blunder." Kondou smacked himself in the face, "I never dreamed you were a girl."

"She's obviously a girl, wouldn't you say?" Okita sniffed. Saito eyed him.

"You didn't know she was a girl." Saito stated coldly.

"Ah Hajime, always spoiling my fun." Okita huffed.

"Then we left two girls bound for an entire night? Oh dear." Inoue looked down, ashamed.

"Well, we don't really have proof." Shinpachi pointed out.

"P-proof?" sputtered Chizuru. Tsuyuki didn't let her worry show, but she would kill them all should they attempt to disrobe her.

"Proof? Really? Not obvious enough for ya, huh? Will you feel better if I strip one of them down?" Harada laughed at Shinpachi.

"Please don't." Chizuru begged, face turning a flaming red.

"You will absolutely not! Even suggesting such a thing is preposterous!" Kondou exploded, face red. Tsuyuki looked Harada over, noting his joking tone.

"It is the quickest way to settle the questionâ€|" Harada slyly grinned before shrugging and leaning back against the wall again. Shinpachi's brows were knit and his arms crossed as he watched the two girls.

"Kill a girl feels kindaâ€|" wrong." Shinpachi admitted.

"It doesn't matter. If we have to kill them, they die. Gender irrelevant." Hijikata demurred.

"Gender \_is \_irrelevant. Killing in general is wrong." Sanan pointed out. "We were organized to protect the public good in the city of

Kyoto. We would ill serve the public good by murdering civilians in cold blood."

"But if they're a threat to the peace it's a horse of a different color." Okita his grin still in place.

"You said you were looking for Chizuru-san's father?" Kondou questioned.

"Yes. My father is the western medicine doctor, Yukimura Kodo. I am his daughter, Yukimura Chizuru." As soon as the words left her mouth, the room went cold and a surprised, hostile "What!?" came from Hijikata. Tsuyuki tensed, shuffling in front of Chizuru to block her from the men.

"So the good doctor Kodo has a daughter?" Sanan's face was in a mask, however the look he had didn't settle right with Tsuyuki.

"All right, how much do you know?" Hijikata asked. His voice was strong and serious, bordering on hostility. Tsuyuki braced herself, ready to rip her bonds apart and grab her staff. She tested her bonds. The rope was very thick, but Tsuyuki knew she could break them

"Uh, 'how much'?" Chizuru tilted her head.

"Don't play dumb. Not about Kodo-san." Hijikata moved, and Tsuyuki acted. She ripped through her bonds like they were rice paper, and she stood protectively in front of Chizuru. Each of the men's hands lingered by their swords.

"Tsuyuki-kun, please, there's no need. Sit down like the rest of us. It's impolite to stand so hostile." Chizuru chided. Tsuyuki looked to Chizuru.

"Your father tasked me with protecting you, and you requested me to be your guard. Should I have to, I will fight these men to my last breath." Tsuyuki told Chizuru, however she grudgingly listened.

"A weaponless girl against several armed men?" snickered Okita.

"You obviously didn't pat me down for secret weapons, kodomo, considering my gender was a secret until minutes ago." Tsuyuki insulted him. She locked eyes with Saito, who met her gaze easily.

"What did you mean, Hijikata-san?" Chizuru began, attempting to ignore the hostile air. Then, she tensed.

"Wait, has something happened to my father!?" Chizuru looked at Hijikata, eyes wide in worry.

"About a month ago there was a fire at the workplace of Kodo-san." Saito began, not losing eye contact with Tsuyuki, "He has been missing ever since."

"What?!" Chizuru gasped.

"The fire was suspicious, but no body was found. However it's possible he was involved in some sort of incident." Sanan

added.

"We're in the process of tracking Kodo-san ourselves." Hijikata sighed, before looking at Chizuru, "If you forget all about the events of last night, you can stay under our protection until we find Kodo-san."

"She doesn't need your protection." sneered Tsuyuki.

"No, this is a good thing Tsuyuki! Now you can return home, you were busy when I had you leave, were you not? You had been low on sleep and you looked like the living dead when I had met with you. I believe you said you had a family issue?" Chizuru looked at Tsuyuki brightly, yet worriedly. Tsuyuki sighed.

"If I wanted to attend to my family issue, I would have to like my family. They're back in the far West, it would take time to reach them and I don't have the money to travel that distance. It is my duty to take care of you Chizuru, I will accompany you until we find your father or until I die protecting you." Tsuyuki replied, her tone leaving no room for Chizuru to argue.

"We wouldn't let you leave anyway, you're under our protection now too since you were also a witness." Okita told Tsuyuki. Tsuyuki merely glared at him.

"Thank you very much." Chizuru bowed to the men. Chizuru sat back up, and Tsuyuki gently took Chizuru's wrists.

"I do believe these are no longer needed." and with ease, the thick rope that bounded Chizuru's wrists was ripped in half. Tsuyuki eyed the room, the atmosphere still tense.

"Good thing you two didn't have to die, huh?" Okita asked, the atmosphere lightening.

"Huh? Oh, yes." Chizuru nodded.

"For now at least." Okita grinned.

"We'll have to treat you two more cordially from now on, since you're females." Shinpachi commented.

"Shinpatsu, you're a sucker for women, aren't you?" Heisuke deadpanned, "But this change of heart is way too fast."

"True, as we're warriors, we'll have trouble handling you two." Sanan nodded. Tsuyuki took offense.

"I may be a woman, but I am a warrior myself. Treat me as any man, to be treated as a woman is an insult to my face." Tsuyuki growled.

"I apologize, but at least Chizuru-san must be treated like a woman." Sanan digressed.

"Then let's make them servants to someone, how about Kondou's or Sanan's." Hijikata offered.

"No way, Hijikata. As the man with the idea, responsibility falls to you. You get one of them." Okita pointed out slyly.

"Yeah, Chizuru'll be safe at your side, Toshi." agreed Kondou. Hijikata looked alarmed at the way this was going.

"It's decided, Hijikata-kun. You get Chizuru. Do your best to take care of her, will you?" Sanan's smile showed teasing. The others all, laughing, congratulated Hijikata.

"You bastards." he muttered, looking away from them.

"Then who should get Tsuyuki?" questioned Chizuru curiously.

"I'll take her." Everyone blinked, looking to Saito.

"She showed proficiency with a sword." was his explanation. Tsuyuki shared a look with Chizuru.

'It seems,' Tsuyuki thought to herself, 'That perhaps this arrangement may not be too bad.'

Later that night, after Tsuyuki and Chizuru were in their room with a hidden guard, Saito, Okita and Hijikata sat in Hijikata's room as he wrote on parchment.

"What do you think of them?" Okita asked.

"I don't trust Tsuyuki, she is a foreigner, yet her name is Japanese. And she is intelligent, too intelligent. We must watch her carefully." Saito spoke up.

"I thought you admired her proficiency with a sword?" Okita responded after watching Hijikata pause in his writing.

"When fighting us, she used two swords, one in each hand. She didn't falter under the weight, and she was able to dodge our blades easily." Saito explained.

"What about that staff she carries?" Hijikata questioned.

"I looked at it, commander. It has grooves in it and is almost as tall as Harada's spear when not folded in two as it seems to be. But it is locked like that." Saito described the staff, "Then the top had a broken crystal on the top. It's sharp, but not sharp enough to slight someone open like a sword."

"She's hiding something, and from the looks of it, even Chizuru doesn't know." Okita added.

"I agree. Keep watch on them both. Do not let them out of their room and listen in to their conversations." Hijikata ordered. When they were dismissed, Saito headed towards his room. As he passed Tsuyuki and Chizuru's room, he began to walk softer so that he wouldn't be detected.

"Tsuyuki-kun, they all seem nice." Chizuru tried to assure Tsuyuki. Saito wondered at the honorific, it seemed degrading to refer to another woman as 'kun'.

"I do not trust them Chizuru. We were told we're getting our weapons back tomorrow, as we have to act under the guise of men again, but I



worry about tonight. They believe me to be unarmed, and though that isn't true, they could be planning to kill us tonight. I did not like their reaction to your father. Something is wrong." Tsuyuki snapped back. Chizuru sighed.

"You're too paranoid. They're honorable men. I know you see it too, since you read expressions and eyes like they're letters on parchment." Chizuru chided. There was shifting inside the room that Saito took to be Tsuyuki pacing back and forth as a shadow moved around inside.

"Besides, should they attack, your staff is your main weapon. You're beyond skilled with your twin katanas, but you could take an army with your staff." Chizuru attempted to reassure her.

"I suppose I have the advantage. They don't know the purpose of my staff, regarding them leaving it with me; they didn't realize it was a weapon. A common error, but a fatal one." The shadow that was Tsuyuki sat down on her bedroll and she placed her staff right beside her bedroll.

"Trust in them, Tsuyuki-kun."

"Trust is something that kills. I'd rather not get another scar to add to my collection."

There was silence, but Saito didn't dare to move. Not when he knew that one step could lead to Tsuyuki hearing him. When Chizuru's breath evened and showed she was asleep, Tsuyuki sighed.

"What worries me most, Chizuru-san, is that one day your innocence will lead you into someone that I may not be able to protect you from. I'll give the Shinsengumi this; they seem to be good, honorable men. But times are changing, and good, honorable men won't help against those who aren't."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN<strong>

\*\*Hey, look, I'm alive. Those of you who followed me, expecting either Dream, the sequel to Wide Awake, or the sequel to Dancing With The Devil, this isn't it, obviously. Those two sequels are in the works, I'm attempting to get a solid base that i like for both of them.\*\*

\*\*Anyway, now onto this story's business. I recently played Hakuouki Demon of the Fleeting Blossom, and damn i loved it. I played my first play through without a guide, and no one liked me. Not even Kazama. Then, i realized something. I love Saito so much. And Kazama isn't too bad. Then, just yesterday, i watched the entire first twelve episodes of the anime, which i really wish was Saito-centric but its not. And what i learned is that i really hate about Chizuru is that she doesn't do anything. Like, looking at Kazama, Amagiri and Shiranui, they are badass demons. Even Sen and Kimigiku are awesome. Then theres Chizuru, who kind of sits there. She's a very compassionate character, but her lack of strength frustrates me. As did the lack of Saito love in the anime, thus, i dreamed up Tsuyuki.

\*\*

\*\*This story will be based off the game and anime, I'll be taking alot of dialogue from the game as its easier, there will be stuff that i add in because I am me, and there will be times i refer to the anime (Which sucks because i HAVE to watch it on Animewaffles and my laptop takes forever to load it up and theres so many ads X-X)

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\*\*In regards to the cover photo, i drew my rendition of Tsuyuki. Theres a bit of foreshadowing in the cover, as per usual. Hope you enjoy my story, and as this only the first chapter this is kind of my test chapter. \*\*

\*\*Sayonara!\*\*

## 2. Threat

\*\*\_Honor\_\*\*

\_Chapter 2\_

\_A Threat\_

\* \* \*

><p>Swords clashed and a clang rang out throughout the courtyard. Okita was sitting on the hallway steps, watching as Saito and Tsuyuki sparred. It was their seventh day with the Shinsengumi, and Chizuru and Tsuyuki were kept in their room all hours of the day. This was the first time they were let out.<p>

"Tsuyuki is skilled with her blades, what is it she carries that staff for? What does it do?" Okita questioned Chizuru as Chizuru watched, excited.

"Tsuyuki doesn't like to talk about her abilities, but her staff is her main weapon and her swords are a diversion. Her staffâ€¦ well, you'll see. She won't use it in spars; it's too dangerous despite her skill to maneuver it." Chizuru danced around the topic, answering his question but not fully. If Okita noticed her lacking answer, he didn't say anything. Instead he watched as the spar ended in a draw, Tsuyuki's first sword was at Saito's neck and her other sword was at his heart. Saito's sword was behind her neck and he was almost hunched over her.

"You're very skilled; it was an honor to fight you. You're skilled in left handed swordsmanship as well as a master of Iaijutsu." Tsuyuki complimented smoothly as she sheathed her swords. She looked to Chizuru.

"Well, we'd best train you now also." Chizuru stood up, looking at Okita who gave her a reassuring grin.

"Hajime won't kill you." Okita assured her as Tsuyuki stepped off to the side, leaving Chizuru shocked and in front of Saito.

"But Tsuyuki-kun, I'm used to training with you." Chizuru meekly protested. Tsuyuki shook her head.

"My style of swords is a style you will not see. Dual wielding seems

to not be popular in Japan either, which I had been hoping for when I arrived here from my homeland. And I am not the only opponent you will face; Saito-san will be a better opponent for you for now. He's a master of Iaijutsu, let's give your skill set diversity." and without another word Tsuyuki took her seat next to Okita. Chizuru looked at Saito with determination. She unsheathed her sword and got into the stance she had been taught.

"Come at me with intent to kill. You will not harm me." Saito told her shortly. Chizuru waited for Saito to move, but he merely let out what Chizuru took to be a kind of laugh. He didn't move to get into a position. Chizuru knew that Tsuyuki typically began her spar like this also, so Chizuru nodded before rushing at Saito and swinging at him. She missed as he deftly dodged to the side, and in one motion unsheathed his sword and had it placed at her neck. Chizuru stood, shocked.

'When Tsuyuki-kun and Saito-san fought earlier, they had made it look so easyâ€¦' Chizuru gulped as Saito sheathed his sword.

"Your master should be proud. Your blade was not clouded." Saito informed her stepping back.

"Well, it shows that you two can at least hold your own. We can probably take you with us on patrols soon so that you can search for Kodo-san, we know you've been itching to do so. You'll just have to wait for Hijikata to return from Osaka so we can ask him." Okita announced, walking over to Chizuru. Saito took Okita's seat next to Tsuyuki. Tsuyuki watched as Chizuru blushed, remembering how when Tsuyuki had been taken to take care of her bodily needs, Chizuru had been talking to herself and Okita had been outside as their guard that evening. Tsuyuki and Shinpachi, who had taken her to where she could relieve herself, had returned to Okita smirking and Chizuru blushing wildly as she attempted to fruitlessly explain she had not been talking to herself.

"You taught Chizuru-san to fight?" Saito asked as they watched Okita tease Chizuru.

"No, I've only sparred with her on our travels here. Her father had her under the tutelage of a skilled instructor from Edo." Tsuyuki corrected him.

"Is she hesitant?" Saito questioned.

"Yes, I believe she fears getting hurt. Should she need to, I'm sure she may draw her sword. But she's afraid of pain and afraid of hurting others. Thus why I am with her." explained Tsuyuki, watching as Chizuru blushed madly again and Okita threw his head back to laugh loudly.

"You are a mercenary?" Saito looked over at Tsuyuki, who smirked.

"Possibly. I could also be an assassin. Or a mere warrior. Or perhaps a shinobi." Tsuyuki countered.

"Chizuru-san refers to you as Tsuyuki-kun, is kun not insulting to a woman such as yourself?" Saito tilted his head. Tsuyuki sighed and looked at Chizuru.

"She's very friendly; I was Tsuyuki-taichou to her when we began our journey. Then I told her we are more familiar, and she called me Tsuyuki-chan. I told her that I am Tsuyuki-kun, if anything else. Chan is an insult to me, I am a warrior. Calling me chan is just as insulting as calling me Tsuyuki-hime." explained Tsuyuki. Saito nodded in understanding.

"Alright, let's head back in. It's freezing out here." Okita called. Saito and Tsuyuki looked over at him, and Tsuyuki looked at her fingerless gloved hands.

"My fingers are turning red, it's best to go inside." Tsuyuki agreed, standing. Saito stood behind her and Tsuyuki turned to him, feeling his eyes on her.

"Your yukata is thin." Saito pointed out. Tsuyuki laughed, a creepy, scratchy sound.

"I wear more layers beneath this." explained Tsuyuki. She gestured to the black collar that reached up her chin, the dark blue western shirt she wore above that, the white hakama that was worn under her red yukata. As she moved the fabric, a silver chain caught Saito's eyes. He reached for it, and Tsuyuki flinched back in the most undignified manner he had seen from her so far.

"Don't touch that." she hissed, eyes narrowing considerably. Saito had never taken notice of her eyes before now. Her eyes were the same color as blood, a rare color for eyes he noticed. Her hair was also a strange hue of silver almost white. Were all foreigners strange like this?

Tsuyuki held Saito's gaze for a moment before she turned and stormed off towards where Okita and Chizuru were making their way back to the girl's room. Saito watched her go, taking note that when the wind blew her hair back it revealed a tattoo mostly hidden by the black collar on the back of her neck. Saito looked up at the darkening sky, watching the clouds come in.

'That womanâ€¦|'

Later in the day at dusk, Tsuyuki sat meditating on her bedroll. Chizuru was looking around the room, utterly bored. There was nothing in their room for her to do, conversation with Tsuyuki was out of the question as she almost always meditated when they were in their room, and they were not allowed to leave the room. Chizuru knew Tsuyuki was itching to leave, as Tsuyuki had predicted snow and Tsuyuki loved to meditate in falling snow.

'I remember when I came across Tsuyuki last year, I had been over to her home to ask if she had any dried herbs left and I found her in her yard, sitting on a rock as the snow fell around her. She had looked like an angel, the snow falling around her silver hair and landing on her pale skin. I had been worried; her hands were almost blue from cold. So I had called her and had her go inside. She gave me the herbs I came for and I left, but I peered into her yard again only to find her on the rock meditating once again.' Chizuru thought fondly, recalling her memory. She looked to Tsuyuki. Tsuyuki's face was relaxed, giving her a small, innocent look. She looked defenseless and sweet when relaxed. But when footsteps reached

Tsuyuki's ears, her eyes opened and the look was shattered by the crimson pools.

"Okita-san." she greeted as the door slid open. Okita stuck his head in, grinning lazily at them.

"Hajime says dinner time." Okita informed them as Saito appeared behind him. In his hands were two trays that were precariously balanced with food on them.

"Guys! Dinner time!" Heisuke called as he sprinted down the hall and pausing at Saito and Okita.

"My apologies. I'll finish my job." Saito told him. Heisuke turned to the girls.

"Yeah yeah, hey, what's the harm in letting them eat with us? It must be boring, watching them eat." Heisuke commented.

"I was told they were to be in their room." Saito answered.

"It's okay; Hijikata is out to Osaka on a business trip." Heisuke pointed out. Okita rubbed his chin.

"You're right, it's boring to watch them eat." Okita announced, he grabbed one of the trays Saito had in his arms and passed it to Heisuke.

"Why'd you give it to me?" questioned Heisuke.

"You were the one who proposed it. Let's go." Okita turned and started down the hall.

"Thank you, Toudou-san." Chizuru said politely. Heisuke frowned.

"Listen, you can drop the "Toudou-san" thing, okay? Just call me 'Heisuke'. Everybody else does. Besides, we look to be about the same age. And I'll call you Chizuru." Heisuke told Chizuru before turning to Tsuyuki, "You too. You can't be much older than us, Tsuyuki." Tsuyuki's lip quivered slightly.

"What?" Heisuke asked.

"Chizuru-san is older than I am; I just look older due to my height and foreign facial structure." Tsuyuki informed him, her smirk widening when Heisuke looked absolutely flabbergasted.

"It's not by that much, Tsuyuki-kun. I'm only a year older than you, and you're much more experienced than I am." Chizuru blushed as Heisuke looked between them incredulously.

"I'd say you're joking, but you're not a joking personâ€¦ anyway, let's go eatâ€¦" Heisuke looked between them once more, still looking unsure. But he shrugged it off and started off. Tsuyuki, looking thoroughly amused, followed behind and Chizuru followed Tsuyuki, giggling to herself slightly.

"You're late." accused Harada as they entered the room.

"You kids're late, who's gonna answer to my crying stomach?" questioned Shinpachi loudly.

"What're the girls doing here?" Harada inquired, noticing the girls and looking them over.

"You mean growling Shin." Heisuke snickered at Shinpachi, before blinking and turning to Harada, "What? They're not allowed?"

"Nah, that ain't it. Food tastes better when everyone eats it together." Shinpachi sat back and pat his stomach while grinning.

"Look, quit just standing there. Have a seat." Harada got up and sidled over a spot. Chizuru took the spot between Harada and Shinpachi while Tsuyuki sat next to Saito and across from Shinpachi.

"You guys oughta apologize to my stomach! He wanted to dig in, but I said, 'No, we've got to wait for them.'" Shinpachi commented as Saito set Tsuyuki's tray down.

"You're such a softie, Shin! alright guys, it's time to eat and that means every man for himself." Harada announced. Everyone sat at their places and muttered "Itadakimasu" with their heads bowed and chopsticks clasped between their hands. Then they dug in.

"Man, these portions are stingy. Barely enough to feed a kid, let alone a man. So I'll just have to!" Shinpachi looked over at Heisuke, who sat to his right, "Take yours!" His chopstick flashed out and before Heisuke could say anything he had ripped part of the fish off, "Survival of the fittest! This food is mine!"

"Oi! Shipatsu, why do you always go after my food?" Heisuke sputtered, annoyed. Shinpachi laughed full heartily before replying.

"It's cause of the difference in size, kid! I got a bigger body. That means I need more food!" Shinpachi explained, and Heisuke snorted.

"Well, I'm still growing, old man, so I gotta eat more too!" Heisuke went to go get a piece of Shinpachi's fish, but Shinpachi grabbed the entire fish with his chop sticks.

"Too slow!" he laughed before taking a bite of half the fish and chewing.

"You're eating it as-is!?" Heisuke cried, "At least spit out the bones! that's disgusting." Shinpachi, ignoring Heisuke, crunched through the rest of the fish and swallowed. He still held the fish tail in his chop sticks.

"Want this?" he questioned, waving it before Heisuke's face.

"No, I don't!" Heisuke yelled.

"It's like this every time," Harada sighed with a grin, "Sorry for the ruckus."

"Why don't ya eat it?" Shinpachi pushed the tail into Heisuke's face.

"I said I don't need it!" Heisuke protested, leaning back away from the offending fish tail.

"It's fine. It's fun, eating together and it being lively." Chizuru replied to Harada with a smile. Harada grinned down at her.

"You've finally smiled." Harada noted in a friendly tone. Meanwhile, Tsuyuki saw the flash of chopsticks from the corner of her eye and she easily blocked them with her own.

"Okita-san, this food is mine." Tsuyuki growled, eyeing Okita who was giving her a lackadaisical grin.

"Is acceptance of such insanity not somewhat frightening?" wondered Saito, blocking a pair of chopsticks from his own food that came from Heisuke, "â€| this food is mine."

"I'm good, if I get too full then I start getting slow." Okita leaned back patting his stomach. His tray was almost empty, some of the fish still sat there.

"Hey! What do ya mean, 'slow'!?" cried Shinpachi as he eyed Okita's tray, "Whatever, I'm taking that." Shinpachi snatched up the remainder of Okita's fish and gulped it down as he did to the previous fish.

"Go for it," Okita pushed his tray toward to reveal a few vegetables were left in a bowl, "So long as I got a little sake to sip, I'm good."

"I guess I'm going with sake too." Harada smiled contentedly as he sipped his sake.

"Pass me the sake." Tsuyuki requested, receiving a few looks.

"Can you even drink?" inquired Okita, "Besides, women don't really drink sake."

"You forget I'm a foreigner and that before I am a woman I am a warrior." demurred Tsuyuki as she grabbed the bottle of sake. She poured it into her cup and sipped it. She put her cup down.

"I've always liked sake. It tastes like the wine where I come from, only it's stronger." Tsuyuki let lose a little smile, which made everyone feel a little bit more cheerful. Tsuyuki didn't smile often.

"You two, eat your hearts out okay? You're not freeloaders or anything." Harada told them when he noted Chizuru's picking at her food.

"I feel a little bad for not helping at all." she admitted.

"Eat. You have to protect what's yours. How can you when you have no energy?" Saito didn't say any more, instead going back to his meal. Tsuyuki finished her own meal, eyeing Saito's rice. Then, quicker than Saito could block, she had swiped up a bit of rice.

"Every man for himself." Tsuyuki snickered when Saito glared at her. He opened his mouth to speak, but the door slid open and Inoue entered the hall.

"Gentlemen, do you have a moment?" Inoue inquired. His voice was warm but his eyes showed a solemn sadness. Immediately, the room's atmosphere changed.

"I've just received word from Osaka. Sanan has been gravely injured in battle." The room went silent, and even Tsuyuki looked on in grave silence. Inoue continued to explain the situation, about how Sanan had been injured by a ronin when investigating a cloth merchant who had been getting harassed by several ronin.

"Will he be alright?" Chizuru questioned.

"It wasn't his sword arm that was wounded. He's almost certain to survive, but wielding a blade will be difficult for him." Inoue answered quietly.

"Thank goodness." Chizuru whispered.

"He should be returning here in a few days. Now please, excuse me. I must speak with Kondou." Inoue bowed to everyone before backing out of the room. As soon as the door closed, the room was enveloped in silence. Saito was the first to break it.

"A sword is not made to be carried in a single hand. If his injury is severe, he may never carry a blade again." Saito stated ominously. Chizuru gasped, eyes wide.

"Couldn't he learn to do what Tsuyuki-kun does?" Chizuru asked weakly.

"Unlike me, Sanan does not dual wield nor is he, oh, how do you say it in Japanese— ambidextrous? Yes, ambidextrous, excuse my accent on the word. Should I lose an arm, I am able to easily still wield one sword. However Sanan's blade requires both hands as he isn't as strong as me or as used to dual wielding as I am." explained Tsuyuki carefully. Chizuru nodded in understanding.

"Well," Okita sighed, "If push comes to shove he'll just have to accept it. Sanan's not the type to give up."

"Hey don't jinx him, Souji. It's gonna look bad if officers start joining the Corps." Shinsengumi spoke up.

"Corps? Isn't that the Shinsengumi?" Chizuru questioned before Tsuyuki could debate if staying silent would be detrimental to them.

"Well," Heisuke began, "Normally, yeah. You might call the Shinsengumi the 'Elite Volunteer Corps'. When we talk about 'the Corps' though, we—"

"Heisuke!" Harada was on his feet in an instant and Heisuke's eyes widened as Harada's fist connected with Heisuke's face. Heisuke was thrown back into the wall and he landed with a thump.



"Heisuke, are you alright?" gasped Chizuru. She didn't move to help him though. Meanwhile, Tsuyuki's hands were on her staff, ready to fight if Harada had lost it or if they had just learned the information that would sentence them to death.

"Sano, you're overreacting." Shinpachi told him, looking serious. He turned to Heisuke, "And Heisuke, think before you open that damn mouth." Shinpachi turned to look at Chizuru, then turned to Tsuyuki only to be met with eyes as cold and hard as his own.

"Sorryâ€|" Harada gave Heisuke a nod of apology before sitting down next to Chizuru again. Chizuru gave him a cautious look before Heisuke who gave them a pained smile. A bruise was already forming on his bloating cheek.

"Nah, I should've been watching what I said. Stillâ€|" Sano you start throwing those things around way too easily. And you hit hard, I can taste blood." Heisuke rubbed at his sore cheek, wincing slightly when touching it.

'Harada-san's punch had the force to knock someone out coldâ€|" and Heisuke is only slightly worse for wearâ€|" these menâ€|" Chizuru thought to herself. She looked to Tsuyuki, who was looking down at the floor. Her eyes were in the shadows, but a glint of crimson flashed between her silver bangs. A smug grin was on her face, and Chizuru knew that like these men, Tsuyuki was also on a whole other level of strength.

"That's all you're going to hear about this particular topic, Chizuru." Shinpachi said, catching Chizuru's attention. She didn't mind the lack of honorific, she actually preferred it, "I'm sure you're curious, but we can't tell you anything else so don't ask."

"That goes to you as well, Tsuyuki." Harada gestured towards the silver haired girl. Tsuyuki nodded, not looking up.

"The Corps that Heisuke was talking about are men to be pitied." Okita spoke up. His eyes were grim, and his tone emotionless. The sudden change from his usual attitude to this melancholy one was too much for Chizuru.

"It's nothing you need to worry yourself about. You don't have to get all worked up." Shinpachi interrupted, his grin uneasily sliding back onto his face. There was a strict, uneasy silence.

"Put it from your mind. Involving yourself in our affairs will only put you in greater danger." Saito professed. Tsuyuki and Chizuru were led back to their room when the tense air didn't go away, and Tsuyuki held her head as if she had a migraine. When they got to their room, Tsuyuki leaned against the wall and squeezed her eyes shut.

"Are you ok?" Chizuru quietly asked, concerned.

"I'll be fine, just a migraine from stress." Tsuyuki whispered. Tsuyuki crawled over to her futon, and slid off her yukata and hakama leaving her in a large dark blue top that was secured to her body by thin straps around her upper arm and the black collared shirt. Chizuru watched as Tsuyuki turned onto her stomach and buried her face in her hands. When her breathing evened out, Chizuru sat on her

own futon. Then she turned on her back and stared at the ceiling until sleep overcame her.

0o0o0o0o0\_July\_Months\_Later\_0o0o0o0o0

Chizuru nervous looked at Tsuyuki, who was composed and elegant standing next to her. Chizuru attempted to copy Tsuyuki's calmness, but felt her nerves get the best of her.

"It is only Hijikata-san, he called for Okita-san and Heisuke as well." Tsuyuki attempted to calm her, as if reading her mind.

"Yes, but he intimidates me." Chizuru admitted.

"Don't let him. Remember, as long as I am at your side, you have nothing to fear." Tsuyuki informed her. Chizuru shook her head.

'You can hold your own against many normal men, but these men aren't normal.' Chizuru thought to herself, thinking back on Heisuke's face. His bruise had finally gone away after several days of waiting.

"You can enter now." Hijikata's voice called from inside his room. Tsuyuki went first, and Chizuru meekly followed behind. Okita and Heisuke already stood waiting. Okita's face had its usual smug grin, and Heisuke looked slightly confused. Tsuyuki took her spot next to Okita, and Chizuru next to Tsuyuki. They stared expectantly at Hijikata, who nodded at Okita.

"You two can leave the compound." Hijikata sighed. Chizuru's face lit up in a bright grin while Tsuyuki nodded as if she had been expecting this.

"You'll be accompanying whoever's on duty. You jump when they say jump, and die when they say die. Are we clear?" Hijikata snapped, his composure staying unlike Chizuru who was barely containing her composure.

"Yes sir!" Chizuru nodded in excitement. Tsuyuki managed a slow nod.

"Souji, Heisuke, you two have patrol today?" Hijikata questioned, looking to the two men.

"Oh, I get it now. That's why you pulled us in here, right?" Heisuke realized. Then he turned to look at Okita, "I think it's going to be Souji's turn this time, though. The First Division's doing rounds today, isn't it?"

"Yes, Heisuke and the Eighth are going out tonight, so think he has a point. They'll be safer during the afternoon." Okita agreed, nodding at Heisuke and winking at Chizuru. He gave Tsuyuki a smug smile.

"Do not forget, kodomo, I am a master of dual wielding. Do not take my skills lightly." growled Tsuyuki in response to his smug smile. His smile turned to a smirk, pleased he had managed to get a rise out of her.

"Don't forget," Okita spoke directly to Chizuru this time, "If you run, I'll kill you. And if we get jumped by ronin, I'm not sticking

around to pull your ass out of the fire, okay?"

"We will stay with you, and Chizuru does not need your protection. I will protect her." Tsuyuki sneered at him. She picked up on his humorous tone, but still felt the need to sneer at him. Hijikata, despite Okita's humorous tone, turned his cold gaze to Okita and glared.

"No, it's not okay, you idiot. Why the hell do you think I'm sending them with you?" Hijikata questioned. Tsuyuki scowled at Hijikata.

'They'd best remember I'm not a damsel in distress like most women.' Tsuyuki thought, eyes narrowing when Hijikata looked to her. Okita gave a short snort of a laugh, and Hijikata turned his gaze back to him.

"I won't run, neither will Tsuyuki-kun. She's very honorable." Chizuru promised, looking between the men and Tsuyuki, "When we came here, we made a deal. The Shinsengumi will help us find my father and we would keep quiet and not run away in exchange."

"We will keep our end of the deal, so long as you keep yours." Tsuyuki added calmly, as if she had not been glaring at Hijikata and Okita like they had truly offended her deeply. Chizuru bowed to Okita, and his smirk slowly became a bit more of an awkward grin.

"I apologize, I guess I underestimated you. Just realize, that there's no way to know what could happen out there. You're not battle hardened like Tsuyuki. Just know that our rounds are dangerous and you'll be in danger should you come with us." Okita told her, serious.

"The Choshu have been acting up. We don't know what they're up to, but it's probably bad for us. I'd rather not be sending you out." Hijikata added, however he seemed to be talking more to himself than them.

Tsuyuki didn't care for their political struggles. She knew some of the Shinsengumi's struggles with the Choshu. She knew that the Shinsengumi were loyal to the shogun and that the Choshu were their enemy at current as they belonged to the imperial nationalist party. Lately they had been turning to force in their pursuit of their goals. Tsuyuki had never cared for politics, she just fought when attacked and lived where it suited her.

"Why are you allowing us out when we're such a burden at a time like this?" Tsuyuki questioned. Hijikata's face hardened and he looked away.

"Kodo-san hasn't gone back to Edo and we've heard that a couple people saw someone matching his description. Besides, you two have been locked up for almost half a year. The Choshu are a threat, but if it wasn't them there'd be a different threat. I have to let you out sometime or else you won't find anything." explained Hijikata. He seemed reluctant, noted Tsuyuki.

"Thank you very much for allowing me to go out. I trust that Okita-san will protect me, as will Tsuyuki-kun." Chizuru bowed to Hijikata, and Hijikata ignored her and turned back to his work.

"I think it'd be good to bring them. Some of the men have fallen ill from the heat anyway." Heisuke pointed out, his tone slightly joking. Chizuru looked to Tsuyuki. Tsuyuki hadn't shed any of her layers from winter despite Chizuru desperately trying to convince her to. July was being cruel, its heat was terrible and the compound was incredibly humid.

"If you want to go, you can go. You have my permission." Hijikata repeated, not looking back from his work. Chizuru bit her lip at Hijikata's tone.

'He doesn't want me to go, does heâ€|' Chizuru looked at Tsuyuki.

"Chizuru-san, if you wish to stay in the compound I can go in your stead on patrol." Tsuyuki offered.

"No, it's alright, I will come too. When do we leave?" Chizuru turned to Okita, who grinned.

"Be at the gate when the suns at the highest point." Okita told her. Chizuru nodded, and bowed before leaving. Tsuyuki nodded at them, and went to leave, but was stopped.

"Tsuyuki, before we let you leaveâ€|" Hijikata looked at her and Tsuyuki turned to look him in the eye, "Will you be fine in this heat?"

"If you refer to my apparel, I will be fine. I have always worn this garb year round." Tsuyuki nodded and left the room briskly.

"Lost your nerve to ask her about her staff?" Okita questioned. Hijikata threw him a glare.

"She's guarded well; I want to see if she's a threat. Chizuru is honest and innocent, but she is not. Watch her carefully, Souji." ordered Hijikata. Okita nodded and left, Heisuke silently following.

When time for the patrol came Chizuru was excited. Tsuyuki didn't share her excitement. Tsuyuki had managed to get a hat to give her face some shade and to attempt to keep her cool.

"We're out here for business, not fun. Don't be too excited Chizuru." Okita laughed as they entered the busy streets of Kyoto. The patrol was in two lines with Okita beside Tsuyuki and Chizuru in the back of the patrol.

"Sorry, things are just so busyâ€|" Chizuru trailed. Tsuyuki understood that being kept inside for all the time had made this outing seem very exciting to Chizuru. Tsuyuki didn't care; she normally didn't go to festivals or out to visit others. Who did she have to visit back in Edo, anyway?

"Well, the Gion Festival's coming up. Things are more lively than usual, I'll give you that." laughed Okita, "Just watch yourself. Some nationalist ronin have been suspicious lately."

While walking down the streets of Kyoto, the blue garb the men wore

would make people step to the side to be away from them. The people of Kyoto feared the Shinsengumi, noted Tsuyuki. Chizuru had been dutifully stopping to ask not as disturbed passerbys about her father. After several apologies and no's, someone had some information.

"Tsuyuki, that store over there!" Chizuru excitedly bounced towards it. Tsuyuki kept up with her, looking back when Okita had went to give them a stern order to wait. However his attention was diverted when one of Okita's soldiers went after a ronin.

"Well shit, they would choose the worst possible time to stir up trouble, wouldn't they?" Okita asked with a shrug and grin as he pulled his sword out.

'Chizuru has Tsuyuki, they'll be fine long enough for me to finish up here.' he decided, running at the ronin. The surge of people running caught Tsuyuki and Chizuru, pushing them towards the store they were heading to.

"Hey kids, get in here. You don't want to be caught up in that fight." the store owner called. Tsuyuki immediately went on guard, but looked as calm as usual on the outside. As they entered the store, Tsuyuki caught eyes with a familiar man sitting outside cleaning fish. Once inside Chizuru brightly went to ask the store owner about her father. However, one of the employees interrupted before she could ask.

"I saw those kids with Okita, the Shinsengumi captain!" the employee called, pointing at Chizuru and Tsuyuki.

"Shinsengumi? Run!" the customers began to stream towards the door, and Tsuyuki shook her head in annoyance. Once the store was devoid of customers, several employees wielding their blades surrounded Chizuru and Tsuyuki. Tsuyuki looked at the employees before sighing. She pulled the staff off her back; there were about two dozen men. It would be best to use staff.

Tsuyuki, not even looking immediately ran for the huddle of men. She pulled at her staff and brought the two sides together, doubling its length to the size of Harada's spear. Pulling at the staff again, it dislodged into two parts. The end with the crystal was wider than the rest, and the reason why was revealed as a scythe blade slid out from its hiding spot inside the staff's grooves. The same thing happened on the very end of the bottom of the staff, only a thin sword blade slid from that groove rather than a scythe blade. The two halves were connected by a chain that had been wound up inside the staff.

"Heh, haven't used my staff in awhile." Tsuyuki murmured, gripping the chain and bottom end. She wound the chain around her fist tightly two times before she was ready to fight. This had happened in the span of three seconds. She spun the scythe end above her head before expertly maneuvering it around and into the body of the closest enemy. As the men charged at her she would slice them apart with her scythe end, and if they managed to dodge or she was too busy with one man, she would use the bottom half's blade to kill them.

By the time Okita reached the store about forty seconds later, of the two dozen or so men, only four were left. And Okita witnessed Tsuyuki's expertise as she knocked them out with either the blunt end

of her scythe from across the room or with the blunt end connected to the chain on the bottom half. When no more men stood against her, Tsuyuki pulled the scythe back in and connected the two pieces again as the two blades slid back into the staff.

"Are you alright, Chizuru-san?" inquired Tsuyuki, looking to Chizuru. Blood stained the room and Tsuyuki. Her hair had taken a brutal spray of blood from a man who had been decapitated, and blood dribbled down her face from where she had been splattered. Tsuyuki looked unharmed, though with the blood covering her it couldn't be known what blood was hers and what wasn't.

Okita watched in stunned silence as Tsuyuki licked the blood off from around her mouth and walked over to them. Tsuyuki looked more alive and excited than he had ever seen her. Her eyes were wide and alert, and her mouth twitched into a wolfish grin. She looked like something possessed. Tsuyuki looked to Okita.

"They attacked us; I left a few alive for interrogation. The rest I killed." she reported, Chizuru nodding along in stunned silence.

"You two are really unlucky, aren't you? I guess I could also be unlucky." Okita sighed. He gestured for them to wait outside as he looked around the store.

"\_\_She's guarded well; I want to see if she's a threat. Chizuru is honest and innocent, but she is not. Watch her carefully, Souji."\_\_

"Well, as long as she's on our side we're fine. But looking at this massacre—" Okita knelt by a body that had been decapitated.

"She's a definite threat to someone. And I hope that someone isn't us."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN<strong>

\*\*Chapter two, woo. Fun stuff. i'm enjoying this.\*\*

\*\*So, names suck ass. I found that when i was rereading this, i accidentally placed Saito for Souji or Okita and etc. So if you see that, read it again to see if it makes sense if it doesn't. And i absolutely love the scene where Shinpachi and Heisuke are arguing over the food. In the game, Saito says "...that food is mine." but it doesn't clarify what he says it to. \*\*

\*\*I love Tsuyuki's badassery. If her staff doesn't make sense, there is a weapon i based it off of but i can't remember what it's called. If you've ever seen Naruto, thing of something similar to Hidan's scythe. Only hers starts as a black stick and the curved blade slides out. The bottom is basically a sword for close combat in case someone gets close to her. \*\*

\*\*Thanks you to the following for reviewing:  
>Star (Guest)<br>unicornmeat3  
>AnimeGirlDreamer<br>Rei-chan the Shinigami\*\*

### 3. Wounds

\*\*\_Honor\_\*\*

\_Chapter 3\_

\_Wounds\_

\* \* \*

><p>After the incident on patrol, they had returned only to be torn into by Sanan. He gave them a thorough scolding, and hadn't even let Tsuyuki leave to wash the sticky, now drying blood off her person.<p>

"You don't need to lose your head over it, Sanan. After all, we arrested a couple of Choshu guys." Okita told him, attempting to pacify him. As it had turned out, upon further inspection Okita had found a massive arms cache. The entire thing was confiscated, and no one had bothered to explain to Chizuru or Tsuyuki what they had found and got caught up in.

"Something to lose my head over?" Sanan repeated before glaring at Okita, "My head is right where it belongs, Okita. Perhaps you should inquire after \_yours\_." Okita merely shrugged in response before Sanan continued.

"The man claiming to be the store owner, Keimon Masu, was in truth Furutaka Shuntaro, a Choshu spy. I assume you were aware that the Shinsengumi was allowing him to operate in the hope of acquiring enemy intelligence?" Sanan revealed. Tsuyuki now saw why Sanan was angry at them breaking the store's cover.

"Yes. I was. But we didn't have a choice this time. I had to bring him in." Okita defended. His excuse was weak, and they all knew it. Okita's petulant frown suggested he also knew it.

"Not like it was a total bust. Like Souji said, they did arrest some guys." Harada offered, his usual smile in place.

"But don't you feel bad for Shimada and Yamazaki? They were staking out the place to keep an eye on Furutaka." pointed out Heisuke. Shimada, a large friendly man, interrupted before a smiling Heisuke could continue.

"We appreciate your concern Toudou-kun, but nobody needs to lose any sleep on our account. We were getting nowhere with Masu's the last few days anyway. Tsuyuki-san did us a favor." Beside Shimada, Yamazaki nodded.

"Furutaka's arrest is over and done. You won't hear any complaints from us about it." Yamazaki agreed. Yamazaki was a thin, narrow eyed boy with bright purple eyes that were even more captivating than Hijikata's.

"Man, you two are the definition of stoic and reasonable. Souji, on the other handâ€¦" Shinpachi trailed, looking at Okita. Chizuru frowned, noticing that Shinpachi was going to antagonize Okita further.

"It was my fault! I went into the shop when I heard my father had been sighted there. I probably would have died if Tsuyuki hadn't come in with me." Chizuru tried to defend Okita.

"But who was tasked with looking after you?" Sanan pointed out.

"Okita-san was assisting the patrol. He was doing his assignment, had we been swept into any other shop we'd have been fine. We happened to go into Masu's though, and I had no choice but to defend myself. If I were not skilled in my swordsmanship then I would not have taken all the men inside. Okita-san arrived less than a minute after we went inside." Tsuyuki spoke up. Everyone looked to her. She had already been looked over to see if she was wounded. Her staff was still on her back, and it was surprisingly clean considering the fight she had just undergone. Sanan glared at Tsuyuki, but she easily held his glare.

"The captain of our First Division can't even keep track of his only two charges. He is a captain; he should be able to handle two charges and ronin. Is this the best the Shinsengumi can do?" Sanan yelled. Chizuru frowned, thinking back to when she had first met Sanan. He had been nice and quiet. However after his arm had been injured Sanan had changed drastically. He snapped at everyone and was never pleased.

"I told them they could go. They were only following orders." Hijikata snapped at Sanan, arms crossed as he entered the room. Sanan looked over at him, but said nothing.

"If you're here, that means you're done interrogating Furutaka, right?" Harada questioned. Hijikata didn't even blink.

"They're waiting for a day when the wind picks up, then they're going to set Kyoto on fire and kidnap the emperor while everyone else is losing their shit. So they say, at least." Chizuru blanched at Hijikata's calm and measured delivery of the report. Tsuyuki didn't blink at it, hearing the undertone of importance.

"Burn down the city?" Shinpachi repeated, "Those Choshu guys are crazier than I thought." Following this comment Shinpachi made a rude gesture that Chizuru blushed and turned away at while Tsuyuki rolled her eyes.

"So they just want to kidnap the emperor? Seems contradictory for guys who call themselves imperialists." Heisuke pointed out.

"Whatever their reasons, we can hardly ignore their plans." Saito added.

"They're probably meeting tonight as they're panicking over Furutaka's capture, we need to get ready to move out." Hijikata announced.

"Understood, commander." Saito nodded.

"Alright! Finally! I'm getting chills." Shinpachi grinned at Harada who grinned back.



"Going by what we've seen they're meeting at either the Shikoku or Ikeda Inn." Shimada announced, Yamazaki nodded beside him.

"Let us prepare." Hijikata announced, and the compound soon livened up. Chizuru helped by gathering medical supplies with Yamazaki while Tsuyuki headed to the well to draw water to rinse herself off with. After getting a bucket of water she stripped off her yukata and hakama, setting them aside to be washed. She looked down at the pants she wore under her yukata, noting that the yukata had shielded it from blood splatter. She pulled off her shirt and was left in her chest bindings and a black corset that wrapped around her neck but left most of her shoulders bare. The black collar that wrapped around her neck was from the corset.

"You shouldn't sit in the courtyard in a state of indecency." Tsuyuki looked over her shoulder, noting Saito had snuck up on her while she had been focusing on undressing.

"In the west, women wear these. I feel no shame." Tsuyuki retorted, rinsing her hair out with the water.

"Your chest bindings can be seen." pointed out Saito, eyes strictly staying on her face.

"That is fine, they're just bindings. I see no issue with the bandages I use for my bindings being open. Harada-san has bandages on his chest visible." Tsuyuki replied, using some of her wet hair as a cloth to rub at her face and remove the blood that stained her pale skin. Saito found their back and forth less than amusing, so he got straight to the point.

"The commander wishes you to accompany us as a warrior tonight." Saito informed her. Tsuyuki's eyes widened in surprise before she composed herself. Saito gave her a small smile as he looked to the side to hide it. Despite his small smile, he spoke in his usual bland, composed business tone.

"Your skills are satisfactory. You will be joining Kondou. Most of the soldiers are sick, your help will be needed. Harada, Hijikata and I have twenty four soldiers. We believe they are meeting at Shikoku as they have always met at Ikeda and they're on guard tonight, so the twenty four soldiers are heading there with us. Kondou, Heisuke, Souji, Shinpachi, and you will head to the Ikeda with ten men. You have fewer men, but more skill while my squad has more men with less skill." Saito explained. Tsuyuki blinked. That had been the most she had ever heard Saito speak, and of course he spoke about details of a raid.

"Of course. When do we leave?" questioned Tsuyuki. Saito looked up at the sun.

"We leave at sundown." he answered, "Be prepared." Saito started to walk back to the hallway, but paused suddenly.

"If you have blue, wear blue rather than your red yukata." And then he was gone. Tsuyuki snorted, and went back to washing her clothes. When she finished washing all the blood off she headed back to her room where Chizuru was already waiting. Tsuyuki placed the freshly clean but stained clothes in a separate pile from the rest of her

clothes as Chizuru looked up from where she was sewing.

"Kondou-san said you'll be going on the raid." Chizuru was biting her lip, looking worried as Tsuyuki pulled a dark, navy blue yukata from a pile of yukatas.

"I am, do not fear for me. You witnessed my skill today, yes? After witnessing that, do you still doubt me?" Tsuyuki inquired. Chizuru shook her head.

"No, I do not doubt your skill, Tsuyuki-kun. But, please be careful. I'll be staying here tonight." Chizuru pleaded. Tsuyuki gave her a ghost of a smile.

"I'm hard to kill, do not fear for me, Chizuru-san." Tsuyuki pulled her dark blue yukata on over her corset and tied it with red fabric around her waist. She pulled her headband off. Chizuru looked her guard over as she changed into more battle suited clothes. Chizuru's eyes sparkled with innocent curiosity when she saw a mark on Tsuyuki's forehead.

"Tsuyuki-kun is that, a tattoo? On your forehead?" questioned Chizuru as Tsuyuki pulled a metal forehead protector from her pile.

"Yes." Tsuyuki nodded, offering no explanation or elaboration on what the tattoo was. She tied her hair up in a ponytail similar to Heisuke's, however her hair was far longer than his. Her hair was still wild on the sides and front, her bangs pushed back over her ears. She pulled her new forehead protector on over the tattoo on her forehead before Chizuru, who was shifting to the side to try and see Tsuyuki's forehead better, could get a better look. Tsuyuki stood and started towards the door.

"Be safe tonight, Tsuyuki-kun." Chizuru bid Tsuyuki farewell. Tsuyuki turned to her, giving another ghost of a smile.

"Chizuru, be safe tonight as well." Tsuyuki nodded at Chizuru before exiting and heading towards the meeting hall. She took her place next to Saito as they waited for Kondou to rally the men's spirits. After night had fallen, they marched to their positions. After splitting from Hijikata's forces they made their way to the alleys across from the Ikeda inn. They hid in an alleyway, watching the Ikeda Inn for signs of the meeting.

"Figures it'd be the Ikeda Inn. They always meet here." Okita commented as they watched a man look around suspiciously before closing the window of the inn. Further inspection had revealed ronin entering the building as well as all previous guests being sent away.

"Yeah, but the night of Furutaka's arrest? Seems sloppy to me. Wouldn't they worry we're onto them?" Shinpachi murmured. Tsuyuki agreed. It was very sloppy.

"What's keeping those Aizu guys?" grumbled Heisuke as they waited. Kondou had requested men from the Aizu clan as backup due to their lacking numbers.

"Figures, those Aizu guys would be late." Shinpachi muttered under

his breath.

"What do we do? It'd be bad form to let them escape, Kondou-san." Okita questioned loyally. Kondou grit his teeth, looking from his men to the inn.

"We have no choice. We go in there alone." Kondou announced before looking to Yamazaki, who stood behind Tsuyuki, "Yamazaki-kun, run and tell Sanan they're here, then run and get Toshi and his men." Yamazaki nodded before running off into the dark alleys. Tsuyuki tensed as they advanced on the inn, kicking the front door down.

"In the name of the Aizu Lieutenant General we are the Shinsengumi! We're entering this inn for interrogation!" The words hardly were out of Kondou's mouth when the inn was enveloped in darkness and chaos. Men charged down the stairs towards the Shinsengumi, and Tsuyuki unsheathed her dual blades. Then, she charged forward with the Shinsengumi. Tsuyuki ducked under a blade, slicing open the stomach of her attacker and slicing through another man's thigh. She danced through the men gracefully. However her expression was anything but calm.

Her eyes were wide and alert, they didn't lack their usual intelligent gleam but had someone looked into her eyes they would question the coldness held in them as she sliced through bodies. Blood already drenched the inn and almost everyone inside. The taste of iron filled Tsuyuki's mouth as she licked her lips, and the smell of it was overriding anything else she could possibly have smelled.

Tsuyuki followed Okita and Heisuke as they climbed the stairs. She sliced through reinforcements and they entered the silent upstairs. Already Tsuyuki's yukata was stained with blood, and her hair was shining underneath a coat of gore. Okita moved to the first door he saw with slight, slowly opening it and peering inside. The light came from an open window, where two men sat as silhouettes as they watched the fighting. They turned to look at Heisuke and Okita as they entered the room. Tsuyuki went to follow, but she stilled from shock when she saw two well dressed men.

"They look too regal to be grunts..." growled Tsuyuki. She lingered behind in the doorway as Heisuke rushed at the tall, calm man. The man's gloved hands blocked Heisuke's blade before punching him. Heisuke was thrown through the air further than when Harada had hit him, crashing through the doorway and narrowly missing Tsuyuki. Tsuyuki looked to the man; she knew that wasn't the man's full strength. He had been holding back considerably.

"Stop, we have no reason to fight. If you fall back, I won't take your life indiscriminately." the red haired man calmly stated, his voice deep and monotone. His blue eyes watched as Heisuke stood once again. Heisuke had been shocked still for a moment after being hit, but he wouldn't back down from this fight.

"We do have a reason. We can't overlook what you Choshu guys are doing!" Heisuke announced, rushing forward again. The man caught his blade easily with his large fist, stopping Heisuke in his tracks. Heisuke's eyes widened and he attempted to pull his blade back but the man held it firmly.

"I can't say I'm pleased you've decided I'm a Choshu." he demurred before chopping down on Heisuke's arm. Heisuke's hand let go of his sword, and the man took a heavy step forward before punching Heisuke again. Heisuke's forehead protector cracked and blood spouted from his forehead. Heisuke was thrown across the room again and through a wall into the next room beyond the hallway. Heisuke watched as the man started towards the windows before his eyes rolled back and he fell unconscious. Okita, meanwhile, was attempting to kill the blonde man.

The blonde man's eerie red eyes that reminded Okita of Tsuyuki's eyes silently observed as he easily dodged every slice from Okita's sword. The man stopped dodging when a lock of blonde hair was cut from his bangs and he caught the next swing on his sword's sheathe before stepping back and drawing his blade.

"You may be worthy of sinking my teeth into." the man calmly, yet smugly commented.

"Let your guard down and you'll find those teeth being knocked out of your mouth!" Okita retorted, charging at the red eyed man. He attempted to stab through him, but the man caught his sword under his arm. Okita yelled as the man kicked out, sending Okita flying. Blood dribbled from Okita's mouth as he coughed, specks of blood spraying onto his arm. The red eyed man held his sword towards Okita, who still stood but blood continued to dribble endlessly from his mouth. He was hunched over and wobbling, breathing harshly and roughly. Opposite Okita stood the red eyed man, his face in a twisted, smug grin. Okita ran at him again, but the man easily dodged to the side and sliced through Okita's arm. Okita fell from the blunt of the attack, his arm being merely scratched. He dove at the man again, the man easily parrying with his own sword.

"That's the extent of your skill?" laughed the man before flipping his sword and rushing the handle of his blade into Okita's chest. Okita fell back against the wall, coughing more blood up from the force of the blow. Tsuyuki grit her teeth, not wanting to involve herself in Okita's fight. She didn't want to hurt his pride, but she knew this man would kill him if she didn't act.

"Stop, I am your opponent now." Tsuyuki stepped into the room, and she locked eyes against the man. His eyes widened slightly, and his mouth parted into a wider grin as he appraised her.

"One of his comrades?" the blonde man sneered and flicked his sword out, and Tsuyuki sheathed her swords before pulling her staff from her back.

'This man, he isn't an ordinary ronin. Best to be safe than sorry.' Tsuyuki thought to herself as she made to slide the blades out like she had earlier in the day. When nothing happened other than an empty crunching noise, Tsuyuki froze. Crusted blood was stuck to the blades, making it impossible to slide the blade out without cleaning it first.

'I have made a fatal error,' realized Tsuyuki as she stood up proudly, 'I will have to use option two.' She spun her staff around, and four blades slid from the staff. Two scythe blades slid out on each end on opposite sides while the blade of a sharp axe slid out opposite of the scythe blade. She held it in the middle of the staff,

not disconnecting it this time. She now held a large weapon that resembled a double sided battle axe.

"Prepare to die." snarled Tsuyuki. She rushed forward at the man, swinging one end of her staff at him. He blocked with his sword and allowed her to flip over him, but he dodged as she attempted to slice his head off with the other end of her staff. He turned and kicked at her, but she caught his foot with her staff. She grabbed his foot with one hand while the other spun the staff above her head. She twisted his foot to the side to throw off his balance, but he allowed this to happen. He landed on the ground, holding himself up with one hand while he spun with her twist. She jumped back, narrowly missing a roundhouse kick to her face.

"Tsuyuki-kun!" Tsuyuki looked to the side in horror as Chizuru rushed through the doorway towards Okita. To Chizuru, they were no doubt inhumanly fast in their fight. But Tsuyuki couldn't protect both Okita and Chizuru against a man who could easily match her speed and strength with her staff.

"Run! Get backup!" ordered Tsuyuki, turning her head to Chizuru for a split second. But that second was all the red eyed man needed. Tsuyuki turned back in time to watch as his blade sliced across her neck, blood splattering onto the wall beside her. She gripped at her neck, eyes wide as blood gurgled from her mouth and spilled down her chin. Chizuru screamed as she watched her guard's neck be gorged out. Blood spilled between Tsuyuki's hands as they desperately gripped at her neck to stopper the blood.

"Tsuyuki!" gagged Okita as he struggled to stand. Tsuyuki's hands and neck were dyed the same crimson as her eyes as liquid poured down her body. She stumbled back towards the balcony as the man advanced towards her. She hit the edge and looked down to see battles raging in the courtyard. Below, she was able to make out Saito's form flashing past enemies. As if he felt her brief look at him, he looked up.

Saito was witness as the blonde man kicked out, catching Tsuyuki's chest and knocking her over the edge. She plummeted to the ground, landing with a sickening crack and thump. Back upstairs, Chizuru had rushed towards the balcony but Okita moved before her and attempted to get the blonde man while his back was turned. The man turned quickly and parried before pushing Okita back.

"The moment you all rushed in my job was over." the man started towards the balcony again. Okita went to chase after him, but he collapsed to the ground.

"No! I can't! I can still fight." Okita yelled. The man looked back at him, gave an unimpressed look, and stepped onto the balcony before jumping off. Chizuru knelt down next to Okita.

"Okita-san? Okita-san!"

Down on the ground, Tsuyuki was tangled in a bush. She was drenched in blood, most her own. She attempted to stand, but groaned. She could feel her neck's wound thinning, but she knew that the wound would be there for awhile. Her bones were setting again, so she didn't move. She had watched the blonde man as he jumped from the balcony, gave her a slightly annoyed look, and made the large jump

across the yard to land over the fence. After he had disappeared in a split second, Tsuyuki felt her head begin to spin when she attempted to sit up. She leaned back down, her eyes losing vision.

"Tsuyuki-san?" Saito's face blocked out the light of the rising sun, and Tsuyuki eyed him when her eyes were able to focus again.

"I'm fine; just give me a few moments to compose myself." Tsuyuki told him as she sat up. She pulled off the fabric holding her yukata shut and wrapped it around her neck to hide the wound. Her yukata fell open, revealing the westernized clothing beneath.

"How did you survive?" Saito questioned, looking from the balcony to Tsuyuki's injured form.

"It's only a fall from the second floor, and this bush broke my fall. My neck's bleeding badly, but it's a shallow wound." reported Tsuyuki as she rolled onto her hands and knees. Then she slowly pushed herself up before she stood and turned to Saito, whose eyes momentarily showed great surprise. Tsuyuki took a tentative step towards him to test her legs and balance. When she didn't fall, she took another and another. She misjudged her legs though, and her knees buckled beneath her when she reached Saito. Saito caught her as her eyes rolled back into her head and she knew no more. Saito lifted her up and carried her to where they were going to quickly evaluate their wounded. Tsuyuki hung from his arms like a ragdoll, her body was limp and blood was caked to her form.

"Tsuyuki! No!" Chizuru's gasp caused Saito to turn. He regarded her coolly as Chizuru's eyes reflected horror and remorse.

"She is alive, just unconscious." Saito informed her, shifting under Chizuru's stunned expression.

"Butâ€¦ Never mind, I'm just glad she's ok." breathed Chizuru, looking down at the pale, calm face of her unconscious guard.

"Do you have her staff?" inquired Chizuru when Saito placed Tsuyuki on a wooden stretcher.

"No, I'll return to the back to retrieve it." Saito answered, heading back towards the yard of the Ikeda. He passed several comrades who were searching the inn for any possible leftover ronin. The raid itself had lasted two hours, but to those fighting it had seemed to last only minutes.

Saito rummaged through the bush where Tsuyuki fell, only to find leaves and twigs coated in a layer of blood. He eyed the yard suspiciously as he tried to locate the large black staff. He had seen it as she fell; it had been covered in blood with four blades, two on each end. Something that noticeable and large should have been found by now.

Saito rummaged through the bushes a few more times before frowning and looking towards the balcony. He knew it fell, he had seen it. And it certainly didn't get up and walk away. Saito started towards the fence of the inn and looked over. His eyes narrowed when he spotted a bloody trail that led down the alley.

Saito returned to where the Shinsengumi were ready to march back to their compound. Chizuru gave Saito a worried look.

"Where's Tsuyuki-kun's staff?" Saito shook his head. Chizuru bit her lip. Tsuyuki would be beyond furious when she woke up to find her staff was missing. But, it couldn't be helped. They marched on through the streets as the light of dawn came from through the trees. Citizens of Kyoto parted as the Shinsengumi, blood splattered and carrying wounded, passed through the streets. They held their heads proudly and displayed their flag.

It wasn't until the next day that Tsuyuki awoke in her room. A tray of medical supplies sat next to her with bloodied bandages and stitches. She sat up easily, her muscles not protesting in the slightest bit. She was shirtless and bandages were wrapped around her forehead rather than her forehead protector. Bandages were wrapped around her neck and bandages bound her voluptuous chest. Tsuyuki frowned at her defeat the night prior when all the memories came rushing back to her. Tsuyuki stood up as the door slid open. The familiar face of Yamazaki entered the room.

"Tsuyuki-kun, you should lie back down. Your wounds were deep." he stated as he watched her pull her washed corset on over the bandages. She wrapped the collar in place before ignoring the shirt and pulling a white hakama on.

"I'm fine, but thank you for dressing my wounds Yamazaki-san." Tsuyuki paused in her redressing to bow politely to Yamazaki. His intense purple eyes scanned over her and he nodded.

"Do not overstress yourself; your neck wound could reopen. As well as the wound on your back." Yamazaki ordered. Tsuyuki paused. She twisted her body slightly, feeling no pain or stitches in her back.

"My back was wounded?" she questioned. Yamazaki nodded.

"Saito-kun says you possibly fell onto the blade of your staff. Your clothing was thick enough for us to not notice until we undressed you to examine you here." explained Yamazaki. Tsuyuki nodded, accepting the reply. Then, a thought hit her. Her eyes scanned the room, finding a crucial item missing. Then her hand flashed to her neck and she roughly opened the drawers that Chizuru put her clothes in. Relief flashed in her crimson eyes as she delicately lifted a silver chain that connected to a silver locket. She put it on her neck, rubbing at a bit of crusted blood on the locket. When it was clean, she looked to Yamazaki.

"Have you seen my staff?" Tsuyuki asked. Yamazaki shifted uncomfortably, his eyes looking to where her two swords were blood crusted and leaned against the wall.

"Chizuru-kun thought it best to clean it; Saito-kun may know where it is." Yamazaki bowed and excused himself after answering. Tsuyuki's eyes narrowed at the closing door. She pulled the dark blue yukata she had ruined back on and tied it with the red fabric. Grabbing her swords she slid the scabbards in the fabric and left her room and headed towards the meeting hall, intent on finding one of the captains.

"Tsuyuki, you're already on your feet?" Heisuke commented as she entered the hall. All the captains and Chizuru sat, preparing to eat.

"Yes, I'm a fast healer. I came to request my staff be returned to me." Tsuyuki's eyes scanned the men and Chizuru as the room went deathly silent. Chizuru exchanged a worried glance with Heisuke.

"Your staff was taken from where you fell. We do not know where it is." Saito answered when everyone looked to him, hoping for him to have an excuse. A tense silence came over the room as Tsuyuki's face paled considerably and sadness and anger flashed across her face. She managed to calm herself after a moment, and she nodded.

"I will go track it down then, I will return at dusk." Tsuyuki turned to leave, and Harada and Shinpachi shared a look.

"A woman shouldn't travel at night." Harada called. Tsuyuki paused.

"I am a warrior. If your spear had been taken, would you not fight to get it back?" questioned Tsuyuki.

"Woman or warrior, you're injured. You shouldn't leave the compound." Shinpachi spoke up.

"I am retrieving my staff, whether you permit it or not, kodomo." Tsuyuki snapped, her eyes narrowing when Hijikata stopped sipping from his cup and turned to her.

"Return by nightfall. Should you be any later, we will kill you. Saito will accompany you." Hijikata allowed. Tsuyuki nodded her thanks as Saito stood, his tray empty of food. Saito walked to the door and exited alongside Tsuyuki.

"How do you mean to find your staff? Kyoto is large." Saito inquired as they headed towards the compound's gate.

"My methods are mine alone." Tsuyuki demurred. They stayed silent as they traveled to the Ikeda. Tsuyuki looked through the yard before hopping over the fence. Saito was momentarily shocked at her nimbleness. Her wound would open if she continued like that.

"Let's follow the blood for now. When we lose it we can attempt to find a shop that smuggles weapons." Tsuyuki announced, eyes not leaving the bloody trail. They began to follow it through the alleys, ignoring the ronin they passed. The ronin looked as if they'd attempt to mug them before seeing Tsuyuki's bloodstained yukata and recognizing Saito as Saito Hajime, one of the captains of the Shinsengumi.

"Your weapon is foreign; its value is no doubt high." Saito stated as they reached a road filled with shops, stands and civilians. Tsuyuki shrugged as they turned onto it, blending in with the ronin that wandered the streets.

"It's a one of a kind weapon, it was made specifically for me byâ€ well, it holds sentimental value." Tsuyuki admitted softly. Saito looked to Tsuyuki to see her gazing into the sky with glazed eyes. He



silently waited as her mind wandered through memories before she snapped back to the present.

"Let's go. I intend to get my staff back." Tsuyuki rested her hands on her swords as she ambled towards a shop she watched a ronin enter. Saito followed behind her in silence like her shadow. Tsuyuki ducked through the doorway of the shop, and smirked when she found the store owner haggling with the ronin over a sword he had on display. However when the store owner glanced in her direction, both froze.

"Hime?" the owner asked, amber eyes squinting at her as if making sure they weren't day dreaming. The store owner was a middle aged man with flaming amber eyes and dark green hair. Flashes of memories flashed through Tsuyuki's mind, and she closed her eyes and put her hand to her temple.

"You're alive? You look great, it's been awhile. How long have you been in Japan? I guess you look good because of your condition." the man happily chatted to Tsuyuki, coming closer. Tsuyuki was silent, her eyes wide with surprise and horror at the man before her. She closed them for a second to regain composure.

"Stay away!" snarled Tsuyuki, red eyes burning when she opened them.

"Hime!" the owner stepped back, then realization crossed his eyes, "I see, so you thought that I died. I can't say it didn't look that way." The man headed back to the counter, shooing the ronin away. He rustled around behind the counter before producing the black staff Tsuyuki had been searching for.

"I thought this was yours. I could recognize this anywhere; Matthias had made it just for you after all. A bloody ronin brought it in last night and sold it, I didn't ask questions. I assumed he won it in a fight as he was stained with blood and wounds. When I looked closer at it this morning, I was surprised to see what it was. I thought maybe it was just a bloody battle axe, but the grooves and initials at the bottom proved otherwise." the man placed the staff on the counter. Tsuyuki slowly grabbed it and hooked it back onto her back. She nodded at the man.

"It's funny, how it ended up here. Fate, perhaps?" mused the man.

"Fate has been cruel, to lead us together again. Forget you saw me." Tsuyuki demanded, turning on her heel and walking to Saito. The man scowled at her, eyes disapproving.

"\_Raven\_." the man stated firmly. Saito's eyes widened slightly as Tsuyuki visibly flinched.

"Call me that again and I'll slice your head off." Tsuyuki seethed.

"I apologize, but I want to know what you've been up to. It's been years, don't you want to know what has happened since you left?" the man pleaded. Tsuyuki didn't move.

"I left for a reason. You all have been dead to me for years, as I have been dead to you." and Tsuyuki stormed from the shop. Saito

looked from the dejected shop keeper to where Tsuyuki had stormed out. Saito followed behind after a moment. Saito came out to Tsuyuki muttering in a different language. Her tone suggested she was angry.

"What are the chances, Saito-san?" Tsuyuki rounded on Saito, "What are the chances of a man you thought dead to just, reappear in a coincidence?" Saito chose his words carefully.

"Fate works in strange ways." Saito finally decided to state. Tsuyuki snorted.

"Where I come from, fate is a load of bull crap." Tsuyuki started down the road, and Saito followed behind and managed to keep in step with her enraged pace.

"Who was that?" Saito asked when they reached the alleys and Tsuyuki calmed herself.

"Sebastian. He was the brother of my best friend when I was young." Tsuyuki answered briskly as she paused. She looked up at the sky, "When I was little I was always challenging men to sword fights. Problem was, dual wielding wasn't very popular. Nor were swords once guns came about. My best friend was a boy named Matthias, he was a few years older than me but we were as thick as thieves. He made me my staff one day when I was shot. He said "A badass girl like you needs to defend herself. No one'll expect this." and from that day forward I treasured my staff. Then, one day I did something I shouldn't have." Tsuyuki stayed silent for a few minutes.

"Never mind. The past is the past." Tsuyuki shook her head, "Besides, you don't care about my life, Saito-san." Saito didn't deny the claim.

"It is my duty to protect you, is the man a threat?" questioned Saito. Tsuyuki snorted.

"Sebastian has always been skilled at making weapons, he had nothing on Matthias but he was still very skilled. The funny thing was, unlike Matthias, Sebastian couldn't wield a weapon to save his life. Even their mother could win against him with a wooden spoon." Tsuyuki sniffed back a laugh as she obviously remembered a humorous moment.

"The past is what has shaped us to be what we are today. Be proud of your past, as your past will decide your future, and all your actions will decide your honor." Saito told her. He started forward, finished with their conversation. Tsuyuki chuckled under her breath. She looked at her blood stained yukata and grungy hair as she slowly caught up to Saito.

"Funny how I became such a shitty person. I have no honor."

Saito didn't comment, he pretended not to hear. He didn't particularly like Tsuyuki, nor did he hate her. But, he did have a slight ounce of respect for her. So far, she had shown to be a decent person and a skilled warrior despite being a foreign woman. She had risked her life for Okita and Heisuke in the Ikeda Inn despite not being an actual member of the Shinsengumi.

But that didn't quell his old suspicions about her. And now with this strange meeting, new questions arose. What condition did Tsuyuki have? What had happened to make Tsuyuki not want to talk to that man? Why had she reacted so strongly to the word "Raven"? What had she done that she shouldn't have?

Questions burned through Saito's mind, but he didn't ask them. He didn't acknowledge Tsuyuki throughout their walk back to the compound. Nor did he acknowledge her until that night when he accidentally stumbled upon her after returning from his night patrol.

The moon was just above the trees as Tsuyuki stripped herself down at the bath in the compound. The bath was outside and it was where they usually washed their clothes. Normally the men would go during the day but Tsuyuki went during the night. Chizuru usually went during the early morning when only she, the captains and Tsuyuki were awake and aware Chizuru was bathing.

Saito had stumbled upon Tsuyuki accidentally when heading to his room after returning from his late night patrol. He had heard someone in the water and went to check to make sure it wasn't an intruder. When he had peered from around the building, hidden from sight, he froze.

Moonlight caused Tsuyuki's hair to glow bright silver, framing her pale body. The water around her was stained a light rust color, but it was being broken apart and drifting away as Tsuyuki rubbed at her hair. Her hair was long enough where it covered her breasts from Saito's view mostly, and the water was just below her naval. Saito's mind stopped as he watched Tsuyuki. He found himself unwilling to look away. Finally he managed to, a heavy blush on his face.

Saito was a handsome man, and women would no doubt gladly be his wife someday due to his looks and strength. But Saito was a samurai, and he didn't need the company of women like Harada or Shinpachi. He had never seen a woman in a state of undress, until now that was.

"Who's there?" snarled Tsuyuki's calm voice as Saito stepped back, forgetting to be as silent as death due to Tsuyuki's abnormally good hearing. Saito stilled, waiting to see what Tsuyuki would do. He heard her leave the water, and the ring of a sword being unsheathed told him that Tsuyuki was assuming he was an intruder.

"It's not an intruder. I am returning from the night patrol." Saito tonelessly called back. Tsuyuki was silent for a moment; most likely she was debating what to do.

"It's rude to watch a woman bathe, Saito-san. I thought that of all the men you would be the last to watch out for at the bath." Tsuyuki told him flatly. Saito didn't react to the insult. He instead started to walk away proudly, making sure to not let his gaze wander back towards Tsuyuki who was now standing out of the water, her body now out in the open as she held one of her swords at her side.

"I stumbled upon you bathing; I did not peek like Sanosuke-san or Shinpachi-san." Saito said after a silent moment where only his fading steps could be heard. Tsuyuki snorted, mumbled a disbelieving "sure" and sinking back into the water after laying her sword on the ground. Tsuyuki sunk beneath the water, missing the red eyes that

appeared in the dark leaves of the forest trees. She resurfaced through the water, and the eyes took notice of how the wound on her neck was no longer there. Not even a scar was left.

In Saito's hidden embarrassment at catching Tsuyuki in the bath, the fact that her neck and back were completely unmarred had slipped his mind completely.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN<strong>

\*\*God damn it Saito, you sexy tsundere pervert you XD And those red eyes, who's that pervert?\*\*

\*\*You can ignore this blurb, its me ranting about Harada's playthrough, and the three game deaths i found.\*\*

\*\*Anyway, in all seriousness, I have decided that Harada's play through is the fucking best play through ever. And I also discovered THE GAME HAS DEATHS. I was replaying from chapter 6 or whatever in Harada's play through from the record of service and doing the part where Chizuru, Harada and Shiranui confront Kodo and i was using the square button to skip through already read text and it stops and I was like "What?" so i read and Chizuru goes to Kodo and is like "Tou-san!" and then he freaking stabs her in the heart and Harada is crying for you as you die and i was like O-O and then i proceeded to find a few more deaths such as in Saito's play through in the ending Shiranui and Kodo finish off Heisuke, Harada and Shinpachi and then come back and Kazama murders Saito and then because Amagiri is awesome and honorable he strides up to you, apologizes, and says "I will save you from the miserable life you will undergo" and then he proceeds to murder you with his badass fists. I also liked the Harada ending where you leave in the night from Shinpachi's and Kazama finds you and the screen goes black and Chizuru says "I don't want to talk about the rest of my days, but i do hope that Harada found a woman to spend the rest of his life with." \*\*

\*\*I have a fascination with bad endings. Like, death, mutilation, sadness... hehehe\*\*

\*\*Thanks to the following for reviewing:

>unicornmeat3<br>Star (Guest)

>Guest<br>Rei-chan the Shinigami\*\*

\*\*I swear, i usually reply to reviews via PM but i'm being lazy because summer... forgive me -\_- '\*\*

#### 4. Image

\*\*\_Honor\_\*\*

\_Chapter 4\_

\_Image\_

\* \* \*

><p>Following the Ikeda Inn, Tsuyuki and Chizuru found themselves

outside the compound with the patrols more often. Neither were offered the blues of an actual soldier, but Chizuru felt as though they were just as part of the patrols as the real soldiers.<p>

In the month of August, Tsuyuki had finally given up her stubborn insistence to not change from her five layers of cloth. She now donned just her chest bindings wrapped up her neck to replace her collar (And to "hide" the remains of the wound from the Ikeda Inn). Her only concern was the chain of her normally hidden locket was now out where others could see it. One day at breakfast Chizuru had made the mistake of asking about it.

"Tsuyuki-kun," Chizuru commented as she swallowed a bit of rice, "I had meant to ask earlier, but what is in your locket?" Tsuyuki stilled, looking down at her chest where her locket peacefully rested. She lifted it with her fingers and rubbed the top, making it shine.

"Memories." Tsuyuki eventually replied vaguely.

"I've never seen you open it; actually I didn't know you had a locket until now really. I kind of ignored the chain." Heisuke added.

"You should be observant, Heisuke." Shinpachi spoke up. Heisuke realized what Shinpachi was doing a second later. Heisuke attempted to block Shinpachi's chopsticks but when he had been distracted Shinpachi had started his siege of Heisuke's plate. Shinpachi had gladly pulled two of Heisuke's five sardines and tossed them in his mouth. Chizuru, still not quit used to watching Shinpachi eat, watched in horror as he swallowed the two fish almost whole, pausing to chew once. With a satisfied look he pulled out the tails of the sardines, tossing them on Heisuke's tray.

Tsuyuki had gotten used to the spectacle, easily eating her own sardine in a similar way. No one had noticed Tsuyuki ate her food's bones and all until late July when Heisuke had attempted to snatch her fish. Much like Shinpachi had their first dinner with the men; Tsuyuki had lifted the fish up and dropped it into her mouth whole. The difference between them eating was Shinpachi had taken large bone filled bites while she had just swallowed it whole. She had been more graceful with it than he had, but she still had been joked at for a few minutes before she had calmly snatched Saito's fish from his plate as he had been finishing his rice and lobbed it at Heisuke. It had slapped him in the face and before Heisuke could get the fish; Shinpachi had stolen it and slurped it down in a messy way that made Tsuyuki's eating seem much tamer.

"Oi! Shinpatsu, don't take my food!" Heisuke shouted, jabbing at Shinpachi's meal. Shinpachi parried with his chopsticks before lifting the remaining rice and pouring it into his gaping mouth. Harada eyed the two before leaning towards Chizuru and whispering to her. Tsuyuki smiled lightly when she saw Chizuru giggle.

"This food is mine." Tsuyuki's chopsticks slashed at Okita's, easily blocking his attempt at her own tray. She was surprised when his other hand grabbed at her locket and popped it open. He caught a quick glimpse inside with his forest green eyes before Tsuyuki had reacted faster than a lightning bolt. Her elbow flashed out, catching Okita in the solar plexus. He gasped for air as Tsuyuki's fist rose up and pushed Okita's head back. As he almost fell on top of

Hijikata, who was silently eating beside Okita, Tsuyuki pulled her locket back and pulled her yukata together tightly.

"Tsuyuki," Okita gasped when he managed to catch his breath and rub his chin, "Who was that green haired boy you were with in the photograph on the right?" Tsuyuki's eyes flashed, her crimson eyes becoming pools of sorrow. She stood wordlessly and left the room, refusing to speak to Okita for the next three days. Anyone else who attempted to ask about her locket also received the cold shoulder for a few days.

"Hey there Chizuru!" Shinpachi's voice broke through Tsuyuki's reverie and she turned to look at Harada, who was hovering over Chizuru like usual. Throughout their patrol Chizuru and Harada hadn't been without the other. He hovered over her when she questioned people on her father's whereabouts, and he spoke to her when they went through the streets, "Find out anything about your dad today?"

"No, nothing today." Chizuru replied sadly, shaking her head. Taking the opportunity, Tsuyuki sidled over to Harada. She gestured for him to follow and she led him to the side of the group.

"What's wrong?" Harada inquired, amber eyes looking around for signs of trouble.

"Nothing, I just wished to inquire about your mother hen attitude around Chizuru-san." Tsuyuki gave Harada a cool look, but he could see the challenging gleam in her crimson pools. Harada rubbed the back of his head.

"One of these days, she's going to ask the wrong person about her dad. I just want to make sure I'm there so she isn't skewered by a sword on my watch." Harada answered after a moment of eyeing a ronin. Tsuyuki searched his eyes for a moment before accepting the answer. They wandered back to where Shinpachi's contagious optimism was infecting Chizuru.

"Well, Shinpachi? You find anything exciting?" Harada questioned with his usual aloof look. His eyes showed seriousness in them though, as Harada took his duty seriously.

"No, nothing in particular, butâ€¦ well all the people on the street are actingâ€¦ busy, you know?" Shinpachi quietly commented. Harada and he eyed the civilians, who flitted about nervously around the patrols.

"You think they're worried about getting caught in the middle of a war?" Harada asked with a nod.

"They see the blues of the Shinsengumi and fear strikes their hearts." Tsuyuki supplied, eyeing the blues of the patrol. While she and Chizuru could blend with civilians, the rest of the patrol could not.

"That may be true, but there's also those Choshu bastards showing up around Kyoto again. That's why there are extra watches these days." Shinpachi helpfully responded, Chizuru's slightly confused expression turning to a knowing one.

"Well, we did give them a bit of a bloody nose at Ikeda. I can't imagine they'll just stand around with some of their guys in the ground." Harada pointed out, eyes drifting to Tsuyuki.

"Tsuyuki, behind you, there's a man who's staring at you." Harada whispered as Chizuru turned to Shinpachi, talking about how the Shinsengumi were seen in better light after Ikeda. Harada's lackadaisical grin made it seem as if he hadn't just told Tsuyuki of a possible attacker. Tsuyuki nodded, and turned to fully face Harada, as if about to engage in conversation. However her eyes strayed to a familiar green haired man. She locked eyes with him and the man started towards them.

"\_Raven\_!"

Tsuyuki angrily muttered under her breath in what Harada assumed to be her native tongue as the green haired man approached. Tsuyuki turned abruptly, drew her sword and in a flash of silver one of her dual blades was at the man's throat. He gave an awkward laugh as Chizuru and Shinpachi quieted. The civilians on the street began to hurry away from what they saw to be a fight about to break out.

"I told you, Sebastian, to never refer to me as that again. I also thought I made it clear that we never cross paths again." Tsuyuki sounded as calm as ever, but Harada, Chizuru and Shinpachi noticed her tensed body. Her other arm was at her side, not near her sword. Harada and Shinpachi shared a look, both not sure if the man was a threat or not.

"I found something I thought you'd like a few days ago. Then, you passed by my store on your patrol today so I followed you." Sebastian shamelessly admitted as he rustled through his bag. Tsuyuki frowned. She had been purposely avoiding the patrols that would take her past his store as a precaution to avoid him. Unfortunately, Harada had changed their patrol with Shinpachi's last minute and Tsuyuki was unable to back out.

"Mother always saw you as her daughter, and I told her you were alive and well. She asked me to give you this." Sebastian pulled a parcel from his bag. It was wrapped in expensive paper with a red ribbon that was no doubt silk around it. Tsuyuki sheathed her sword after a wary moment.

"â€| How is Isolde?" Tsuyuki accepted the package, making sure her hands didn't touch Sebastian's. Sebastian's eyes lit up at her making conversation. Tsuyuki refused to meet the amber pools that were his eyes.

"Mother is well; she's well into her fiftieth year. Despite her age she's still as she always was. She took in an orphaned boy and girl, she tells me of how the boy reminds her of Matthias and I as she always has to chase him around with a wooden spoon when he sticks his filthy hands in what she's cooking." Sebastian's mirth was contagious apparently, as Tsuyuki cracked a smile which almost had Chizuru fall over in shock.

"I can still feel her beating me with that spoon when I came inside covered in bruises, mud, blood and cuts from my blades." Tsuyuki murmured, eyes light. Harada put a hand over Chizuru's mouth when she went to say something. He made a gesture for her to be quiet with a

knowing smile, and she listened.

"You and Matthias always came in like that. I'm surprised you don't have a permanent indent from where she whacked you." laughed Sebastian. Tsuyuki shook her head and looked down at the package.

"Tell Isolde I will write her when I have the chance." Tsuyuki told him before turning back to Harada and Chizuru, "Perhapsâ€| perhaps we may speak again. Do not seek me out."

"Do you still have the locket Matthias made for you?" Sebastian asked. Tsuyuki paused.

"You know about her locket?" gasped Chizuru, her silence being forgotten.

"Yes, my brother made it for her when we were children. Inside is a picture of she and him, and-" Sebastian was cut off as Tsuyuki gave him a sharp look.

"We will not speak of them here. They are long forgotten in my heart and body." Tsuyuki snarled. She stormed ahead of the patrol, the parcel held in her arms.

"Ah damn, I was doing so well." Sebastian muttered.

"You knew her before she came to Japan?" Chizuru asked him, excitement in her doe eyes. Sebastian laughed at her enthusiasm.

"Yes, she and my brother were attached at the hip most days. We didn't know where she was from, only that my brother was adamant that she was his friend. It wasn't untilâ€| until Matthias passed that we found out who she really was." Sebastian's eyes flickered down at the ground before he turned and gave them a light grin that composed his attitude again.

"Well, I run \_Raven's\_ Weapons, so if you ever need something I'm there. I'm Auvern Sebastian, from England." Sebastian grinned at them.

"You and Tsuyuki have different accents, is she not from England?" inquired Harada.

"Tsuyukiâ€| so that's what she's called nowâ€|" Sebastian whispered under his breath so that only Harada and Shinpachi were able to hear with strained ears. Sebastian looked to them with a sheepish smile to cover his whisper, "I'm not sure where she comes from, to be honest. It's a bit more eastern than England. She's proud of her origin, despite her anger and reluctance." admitted Sebastian before turning and starting down the street. He was swept away into the crowd, and Chizuru turned to Harada who grinned down at her.

"What do you think is in the parcel she got?" Shinpachi asked as they hurried to catch up with an impatiently waiting Tsuyuki who stood at the end of the street.

"We'll find out, won't we? We'll have her open it at dinner." Harada grinned a knowing smile. Shinpachi laughed.



"Oh she's not going to like that."

And indeed she didn't. However she accepted it. That night as she ate quietly, Harada, Chizuru and Shinpachi retold their encounter to the captains.

"and that is what we have learned about the mysterious Tsuyuki!" finished Shinpachi. He had left a few things out, such as how Tsuyuki had acted and the ending bit about how Sebastian had commented on Tsuyuki going by a new name. That was being saved for when Hijikata no doubt would ask for them to report it later.

"What are you, if you're not English?" inquired Heisuke as he blocked chopsticks coming from Shinpachi.

"It doesn't matter." demurred Tsuyuki as she finished the last of her meal. She pulled the parcel from beside her (The side next to Saito as she found he was less likely to take things than Okita) and placed it in her lap. She pulled the bow and the ribbon came off. She pulled it off gently, fingering the soft silk with thoughtful eyes.

"Chizuru-san, may I see your hair?" Chizuru blinked at the request, but nodded. Tsuyuki stood and walked over to Chizuru before crouching. She tied it around the plain rope that held Chizuru's hair up and gently pulled it into a beautiful bow.

"In England, many women would love to wear silk bows such as this," explained Tsuyuki, "As a child I always had silk adorning my hair. It made all the girls jealous, and I had no friends until I met" Tsuyuki went back to where her parcel sat undisturbed. She pulled it back into her lap and unwrapped the paper before opening the wooden box so that she could peek inside. Tsuyuki pulled a paper from the box before closing it and placing it gingerly on her left. She opened the letter and both Saito and Okita attempted to get a glimpse, only to find the writing was not in Japanese.

"Read it out loud, none of us can read English." called Heisuke when Okita shook his head. Heisuke was deterred though when blocking chopsticks that came surprisingly from Harada who was reaching over a snickering Shinpachi.

'My dearest adopted daughter,' Tsuyuki silently read to herself, 'How many years has it been since I saw your beautiful face? Perhaps you could send me a photograph? I have missed you dearly since our last encounter. I had feared your death for many years, but Sebastian always told me you were strong. I was delighted to hear he found you in Kyoto and that you are still using the staff that Matthias made for you. I always was displeased you were a warrior, but now I am glad you have become such an honorable woman. Most girls these days have no thought or intellect. I've managed to keep the girl I have under my care away from the senselessness of the others, but she's certainly not you. I have enclosed a photograph of them; they'll be turning nine in the fall. I found myself dreaming of you and Matthias recently. I had always expected you two to get married one day. Alas, God had other desires. But do not despair over Matthias, I'm sure you will find a man you will love and hold just as dearly as you did Matthias. Do tell me of how you are in a letter soon. Have you found friends? Are you already married? Perhaps a lovely young man is

courting you? With love, Isolde.'

"It's just a letter" Tsuyuki murmured, folding the letter neatly and placing it beside her. She opened the box slightly and pulled a single black and white photograph from it, "Isolde sent me a photograph of herself and the two children she is watching over." Tsuyuki turned the picture so all could see. A woman with what looked to be graying hair and bright eyes smiled into the camera while two children with toothy grins that were missing some teeth were holding onto her ankle length dress. The dress was elegant with long flowing sleeves and an open embroidered collar. The woman's hair was up in a tight yet elegant bun that left her entirely foreign features to be viewed. The two children were rather ordinary with large cobalt eyes and choppy hair. They were undoubtedly adorable.

"That's an old woman." pointed out Heisuke as he finished off his meal.

"Yes, Isolde will not be around forever as much as I wish her to be." Tsuyuki nodded. She put the photograph back in the box before pulling out a somewhat strange box.

"Isolde, that sly woman, she sent me one of the newest models of the camera. This must have taken incredible connections. I suppose when you are Isolde though, everything comes easy." Tsuyuki snorted as she looked at the ink on the bottom of the bulky camera. Then the camera surprised everyone by letting out a bright flash. Tsuyuki let out a rare grin. She pulled the picture that developed from the box, and held it up so the others could see. She had managed to get Heisuke stealing Shinpachi's vegetables as Shinpachi watched the box curiously. Harada was leaning over Chizuru, pointing at the box while Chizuru was smiling.

"Isolde requested pictures." Tsuyuki stood and walked to the end of the room so she could fit everyone in the box's range. Hijikata looked less than pleased, but he didn't say anything. The mirth in the room wasn't doing any damage.

The camera flashed again, but this time everyone was prepared. Saito was as calm and collected as usual. Okita had his usual easy grin on his face as he casually was reaching for the bottle of sake. Harada's lackadaisical look made him look somewhat tired while Chizuru and Shinpachi's large smiles gave off energy around him. Heisuke was leaning into the middle, almost blocking Inoue who was at the very end with Sanan. Sanan had joined the group for their dinner, which was a rare occasion now. He normally did not speak, but in the picture Tsuyuki was surprised to find a small, peaceful smile on his face. Inoue looked as friendly and warm as usual, and on Hijikata's face was what Kondou had teasingly described as a pout. Kondou had arrived quietly to dinner late as Tsuyuki had been reading her letter. Kondou was giving the camera a grin that rivaled Shinpachi and Heisuke's grins. Unlike the photograph Isolde had send, this camera had color.

"I think" Isolde will like this." Tsuyuki admitted as she put away her camera back in the box with the picture and letter tucked in the side.

"You'll have to take photographs of when we're training!" Heisuke piped up.

"You should also find some of nature and buildings," Kondou suggested, "England is far different from here." Tsuyuki agreed with Kondou.

"Perhaps I will, I think I will return to my room." Tsuyuki stood, but Saito stopped her.

"There was another photograph in the box." he informed her shortly. Tsuyuki paused.

"You have exceptional eyes, Saito-san." Tsuyuki looked down at the box before fishing out the photograph he had seen. She looked it over, holding back a few tears. She turned it around to show everyone.

What they thought to be a photograph was actually a colored picture. Colored pictures were extremely rare, and this one was old enough for the colors on the edge to be fading. In the photograph, three children were outside. The oldest was a green haired boy with bright amber eyes. He stood above the other two, grinning at the person taking the photo. Next to him stood what looked like a duplicate of the boy, only a tad bit younger. Finally, in front of the boys was a small, pale girl with silver hair tied with red ribbons. A red dress that was considerably ripped in several places and stained with mud adorned her body. Bright crimson eyes shone with glee as a slight blush overcame her features. She and the younger boy both had wooden swords in their hands as they didn't look any older than the children in the first photograph with Isolde.

"You were so adorable as a child!" cooed Chizuru as she looked on with excitement.

"I was a child." agreed Tsuyuki blandly.

"Sebastian looks to be a middle aged man, yet he only looks slightly older than you in this photograph." Saito noted. Tsuyuki nodded.

"He wasn't blessed with good aging." admitted Tsuyuki as she looked to the box, "He was also a very small young adult." Tsuyuki stood and gathered her box into her arms before leaving the hall. Saito stayed silent as Chizuru began conversation on Tsuyuki's past.

'Something isn't right with Tsuyuki-san.' Saito thought as he finished off his dinner. He excused himself after a moment and made his way towards Tsuyuki and Chizuru's room. He made sure to step lightly and silently. Upon reaching Tsuyuki's room, he slowly slid the door open a crack. He peered in to witness Tsuyuki sitting on her futon, her eyes staring at the photograph. Tears brimmed in her eyes, but they didn't fall.

"Iâ€| Why did Isolde send this? She knowsâ€| she knows it is my fault that Matthias is dead." Tsuyuki's normally calm voice was quaking as she whispered to herself. Saito had always seen Tsuyuki as a cold, collected warrior. He had forgotten that she had emotions like any other human.

"If onlyâ€| I had been stronger. If onlyâ€| I wasn't a useless woman." Tsuyuki rubbed her eyes and placed the photo in the box before sliding the box into a drawer. She stood and grabbed her

staff, "I must train. I mustn't let Chizuru-san down, I have to protect her." Saito crept away from the door as Tsuyuki headed towards it. He acted as if he had just been walking that way and not listening in when Tsuyuki exited her room.

"Saito-san," she greeted placidly, "I am going to be training should someone search for me." She started towards the courtyard, passing by Saito. Saito thought about saying something, but didn't. When she was gone, Saito turned to look up at the sky. Saito became lost in his thoughts.

\_o0o0o0o\_Several\_Days\_Later\_0o0o0o0o0o\_

Chizuru carefully lifted a serving platter that contained several cups of tea. She made her way towards the common room, worrying over if the tea had gotten cold.

"Thanks Chizuru, man, it's almost like you're our servant or something." Shinpachi thanked her as she set the tray down and began to distribute tea. Chizuru had taken to making the meals with whoever was on meal duty as well as getting the sake and tea when required. She also volunteered to wash clothes and dishes. Tsuyuki had looked offended when Chizuru asked if she wanted to help. Then Chizuru realized that she was doing the typical woman chores, and that offering Tsuyuki to help may have looked like she was saying that she should do chores rather than train with her staff.

"Thank you, Yukimura-kun. I feel bad asking you to do thisâ€¦" Inoue murmured as he lifted his tea to his lips.

"It's nothing. You're all always looking out for me." Chizuru cheerfully replied as she handed Tsuyuki her tea last. Tsuyuki and Okita both grimaced mildly when they simultaneously took a sip of their tea.

"Is it too bitter?" inquired Chizuru. Tsuyuki had never had an issue with taste before; she seemed to eat everything and anything. Okita on the other hand had preferences for his tea and food.

"No, the taste is fine." Okita answered, "But it could stand to be hotter." There was a moment of silence as Tsuyuki muttered something about how in England they had milk and sugar to make up for tea when it wasn't at its best.

"The Shinsengumi has received an official request from the Aizu Domain. All available soldiers are to begin preparations to move out immediately!" Kondou entered the room with a large grin across his face. Immediately following his announcement, the room broke into cheers.

"It seems the Aizu have finally noticed all the hard work we've been doing, men." Kondou added, looking just as happy as the rest of the men. Tsuyuki didn't look exceptionally bothered as she continued to sip at her tea politely. Hijikata wasted no time cheering.

"We don't have time for this shit. Stop patting each other on the back and get moving. We need to go now!" Hijikata barked, continuing on with a rant about the Aizu and Choshu before finishing with "So they only realize there might be a problem when the Choshu are ready to attack Kyoto? This is bullshit." Tsuyuki agreed, the order was a

bit sudden and it would have been better to send orders earlier.

"Okita and Toudou, you will remain here at the compound. I doubt you will find this a welcome order, but, well, neither do I." Sanan added, rubbing his left arm absently and looking away to the side, "As with my injury, yours keep you from active duty." Chizuru felt that had been said to at least make them feel guilty. Okita however had no qualms.

"Hey, I'm completely healed. I might not be at one hundred percent yet, but I'm not bleeding or anything." Okita acted as though he hadn't heard Sanan.

"You're making a big deal out of nothing. This's just a scratch! Kondou's being a wuss." Heisuke protested, also wanting to accompany the soldiers. They were used to Sanan feeling sorry for himself, so they had just ignored his comment. Chizuru looked worried, but a sharp look from Tsuyuki told her to ignore the comment as well.

"You sure about that?" A teasing grin lit up Harada's face, "Last night the pain had you crying like a baby before you took your medicine."

"You son of a bitch!" Heisuke cried, eyes wide, "Why you gotta rat me out?! Is there even a heart in there, you old bastard?" Chizuru giggled quietly as Tsuyuki rolled her eyes. Heisuke's injury hadn't finished healing evidently.

"Maybe, maybe not, but you know I'm telling the truth." jibbed Harada. Heisuke eyed Chizuru and Tsuyuki.

"Yeah, but you don't have to say it in front of the girls, you know?" Heisuke attempted to be quiet, but both Tsuyuki and Chizuru easily heard.

"All warriors get hurt; accept the duty of staying behind." Tsuyuki demurred easily. Heisuke's bangs hid the scar, but the evidence of the wound was still there. Having ones forehead protector shattered was obviously not pleasant. There was a few moments of silence before Shinpachi took note of Tsuyuki and Chizuru.

"Chizuru said she wanted to help a few days ago." Shinpachi remembered. Chizuru blushed shyly when attention slid to her, and Kondou rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I don't see why not. Tsuyuki-kun can guard Chizuru and help with the battle." Kondou announced. Tsuyuki blinked and Chizuru looked stunned.

"Well, you sure got lucky Chizuru. Make sure you do us proud, all right?" Heisuke ordered with a laugh. Hijikata sighed from where he was standing. He was giving Kondou a disapproving look.

"We can't promise you won't get hurt, or worse. You should stay here." Hijikata pointed out.

"Do you wish to place undue burden on the Shinsengumi? War is not something one does to ease one's boredom." Sanan added with an uncomfortable cold smile.

"Chizuru-san does not wish to ease her boredom," snapped Tsuyuki, "She wishes to help. She could assist with the wounded or run messages." Saito looked to Sanan and surprised both Tsuyuki and Chizuru.

"Colonel Sanan, can I take that to mean that so long as they are not a burden, they can accompany us?" Saito politely inquired. Chizuru and Tsuyuki shared a look. Both were surprised that Saito would stand up for them. Sanan seemed to be nearly as surprised as the two girls were.

"You can't say you're actually in favor of bringing them alongâ€|. Tsuyuki-kun I could understand, but Chizuru?" Sanan questioned in disbelief. Saito gave Sanan a shrug.

"Both were an asset at Ikeda." Saito answered simply. Tsuyuki remembered Chizuru's proud retelling of how she had been sent with Yamazaki to run the message to Hijikata's group. They had come back and Chizuru had went to stay in the back with Harada, but had heard of Okita, Heisuke and Tsuyuki's fight and had ran through the chaos to get to them. Chizuru then sheepishly admitted she should have stayed with Harada, as her presence caused hesitation from Tsuyuki which nearly caused her to lose her neck, "I only intended to point out that, judged by their actions, neither have hardly proven a 'burden' thus far."

'Saitoâ€| is praising Tsuyuki-kun and I?' Chizuru thought, looking to Tsuyuki and back to Saito. Saito sent a glance at Tsuyuki, who had missed the look in favor of turning to Kondou.

"Excellent! I will take full responsibility in your inclusion. That is, of course, if you still wish to participate." Kondou announced. Chizuru, blushing slightly, looked around the room. Sanan looked less than pleased. Beside him, Okita gave Chizuru his usual catlike grin.

"Do whatever you want to do, so long as you understand that we're going to a battle and not a party." Okita reminded her, not seeming to care either way. Chizuru looked to Tsuyuki for advice, and Tsuyuki lifted her head.

"Chizuru and I will join you for the battle. Should I be involved in the fighting, I will send Chizuru to a point of safety where she will not interfere with any fights." Tsuyuki told them. For Chizuru, everything after that happened quickly. She hadn't changed from her usual clothes. However Tsuyuki had once again donned her many layers above the bandages. Her corset and collar, shirt, hakama and yukata made Chizuru sweat just looking at her guard. Like last time, she changed from her red yukata into a shade of blue. Rather than the dark blue she donned last time, this time her yukata was more of a bright teal than the light blue the Shinsengumi wore proudly. Tsuyuki adorned her forehead protector and cleaned off her staff's blades to make sure they were in complete working order.

They set out marching to the Fushimi magistrate's office where they found trouble. The guard at the gate had not received mention that the Shinsengumi were summoned. Chizuru had looked on in confusion.

"If they haven't received notice of our orders, the lines of communication are likely in disarray. We can assume, therefore, that this conflict has become rather chaotic." Saito murmured to Tsuyuki and Chizuru. Tsuyuki nodded.

"Therefore the conflict has escalated to a full out fight." Tsuyuki agreed.

"I suspect the enemy is doing well." Saito added. The guard sent them away, spitting the name "Mibu's Wolves" at them. Chizuru's eyes had gone round, and Harada leaned down to her level.

"Forget about them. This isn't anything to get worked up about. We get this sorta crap all the time." Harada whispered easily. Chizuru looked ready to protest and Harada continued, "If we throw a fit here, then we might hurt Aizu's reputation. You get it?" As Harada explained to Chizuru, Tsuyuki looked to Saito.

"There's nothing we can do here, Chief. We should leave the magistrate alone and meet up with the Aizu Domain's men on our own." Saito suggested. Kondou nodded in agreement but his frown didn't leave his face. The Shinsengumi set off to find the Aizu soldiers. They had stopped at the Aizu manor which had directed them to where the Aizu soldiers were stationed at Kujo Beach. The soldiers attempted to rebuke them as they had not received word of the Shinsengumi joining but Shinpachi had evidently had enough.

"What the hell?! He was the one who told us to come here, god damn it!" Shinpachi snapped, "You wanna fuck us, fine, but you're gonna be disobeying a direct order from your superior, pal! You really wanna do that?" Chizuru blanched at Shinpachi's words while Tsuyuki snorted quietly. The man who had been yelled at was just as shocked as Chizuru, his mouth opening and closing a few times before he fell silent. Kondou attempted to keep his voice neutral at this turn of events, but nothing could hide the grin that was spreading across most of his face.

"I would like to speak to your commanding officer, if I might. Do you think you might be able to take me to him?" Kondou politely asked. Finally, after the great deal of trouble, they were allowed to remain with the troops that were stationed on Kujo Beach. Tsuyuki and Chizuru waited at the fire for the captains to return from speaking with the Aizu captains. They returned bitter and tired.

"Well, it would seem the men stationed here are reserves, not the main force of their army." Inoue calmly commented, his usual smile upturned in a bitter smile, "Their main force has been committed to the defense of Hamaguri Gate.

"So they are treating us like reserves." Tsuyuki demurred, eyes narrowing considerably.

"Then why the hell'd they send us a message acting like this was some sort of emergency?" complained Shinpachi as he dropped to the ground next to Harada, who perched himself next to Chizuru.

"We can't predict what might happen. We may be called upon to rush into battle. There is little else we can do, for now." Saito spoke up as he took the spot next to Tsuyuki.

"So we will need to be prepared throughout the night in case we are called into action." Tsuyuki surmised. Saito nodded, and Chizuru's eyes drooped.

"Just let us know if either of you two need a rest. You're always welcome to sleep on my lap, Chizuru." Harada offered. Tsuyuki looked considerably insulted at the offer, she was a warrior. She did not need to sleep. Chizuru blushed slightly.

"Oh, no, it's ok. I'm fine." Chizuru whispered meekly. Harada laughed in response at Chizuru's reply.

"Always trying with the women." jeered Shinpachi. Harada turned to him, beginning their back and forth that Heisuke joined in on. Eventually, Chizuru began to doze off and she ended up with her head resting on Harada's thigh. Tsuyuki had eyed this, but didn't say anything. Instead, she pulled her staff from her back and began to check each possible blade slot to make sure none were clogged from dirt or old crusted blood.

"That must be a pain to maintain." commented Shinpachi, quiet enough to not wake Chizuru.

"Not particularly, it's relatively easy. Pour water through it to remove the crusted blood or other substances and then remove the blades to prevent rust as it dries. On occasion I will dry it myself to check for possible rust or rot." explained Tsuyuki as she disconnected the two staff ends to check the chain on the inside. Saito eyed the inside of the staff as Tsuyuki pulled the chain out to check for abnormalities. Inside, he could see many hidden blades inside the hollow staff. Unsurprisingly, no dried blood or other gore stained the inside.

For the rest of the night and early morning, there was quiet chatter. It was in the early light of dawn that a distant gun shot rang through the clear morning air. Following the gunshot was the familiar clang of blades hitting together.

"Time we left." Saito stood, nodding at the other captains. Chizuru was shaken awake by Harada and she looked slightly embarrassed but looked around briefly to find the captains up and moving. Tsuyuki looked down at her, and the half awake Chizuru startled.

For a moment, when Chizuru looked at Tsuyuki, she hadn't seen her most trusted guard. She had seen something terrifying in those crimson pools of her guard. Chizuru eyed Tsuyuki, eyeing the two scars that traced across her face. She briefly wondered how Tsuyuki had gotten them; Tsuyuki was nimble enough to avoid her face being marred. Chizuru didn't ask though as Harada helped her up and she woke completely when another gunshot rang through the crisp air.

"Right." Chizuru nodded when she heard Harada whisper into her ear to inform her what was happening. As the men readied to move out, one of the Aizu soldiers came over, the others watching him.

"What do you think you're doing?" the soldier demanded. Tsuyuki commended his bravery to stand up to the intimidating Shinsengumi captains, "We were ordered to stay here." Hijikata hardly spared him a glance as he started towards the sounds of fighting. Hijikata had



hardly gotten mad the previous day during their march, leaving the yelling to Shinpachi.

"I'm sorry," Hijikata's voice was a bit of a snarl, "I thought your job here was to protect the imperial estate, but I guess you'd rather just sit around. We're here because we're supposed to help if those Choshu assholes attack! Tell me, what are the Choshu doing, right now?"

"B-but we've received no orders-" Hijikata cut the unfortunate soldier off. Chizuru briefly wondered if perhaps they had drawn straws to see who would confront them.

"If you've got any kind of honor or pride in your job, then forget your goddamn orders and move!" Hijikata did outright snarl at this point. He didn't wait for the absolutely shocked still soldier to respond. He spun on his heel and stalked off, fuming. Tsuyuki shared a look with Chizuru.

"W-where are we going?" Chizuru asked in a quiet whisper. Saito looked down between Tsuyuki and Chizuru.

"To the enemy, which in this case means Hamaguri Gate. The battle is likely to be an intense one. You had best prepare yourself." warned Saito as they began to move. Following behind were the roused Aizu soldiers. Hijikata's furious speech had evidently inspired them.

Arriving at the gate brought Chizuru to silence. The gate was marked with bullet holes and littering the ground were the corpses of soldiers. Soldiers who were still alive groaned and moaned as their life bled onto the ground in crimson liquid. An acrid smell permeated the air, and Chizuru put her sleeve over her nose.

"What are the Choshu thinking?" Kondou wondered as he looked through the battlefield after sending Saito, Harada, and several other men to find out what happened, "They've raided the imperial estate."

"How can they claim to be an imperial domain?" wondered Inoue. Kondou only nodded. Saito returned after a moment, his intense blue eyes neutral.

"It appears the Choshu attacked Hamaguri in the early morning but were repelled by the combined forces of Aizu and Satsuma." Saito reported. At the news, Hijikata's mouth curled up into a grin.

"So Satsuma is helping Aizu now, are they? Times sure are changing." he mused humorously. Tsuyuki stayed quiet. She was even more behind on political struggle than Chizuru. She couldn't input into the conversation anymore than Chizuru could.

"There are still some of those Choshu bastards fighting over at Kuge Gate." Harada informed them as he returned from his investigating. Hijikata pondered the information with his smile disappearing, not giving an order before Yamazaki, who was garbed in clothes that reminded Tsuyuki of a shinobi, appeared with his report.

"Commander, we believe the men who led this raid are headed for Mount Ten'nou." Yamazaki told Hijikata with a nod. Tsuyuki had learned that most men, even Kondou, went to Hijikata for his input on most

decisions. Hijikata's mouth curved into a small smile.

"Well, looks like we've got our work cut out for us, boys." Hijikata announced as a ripple of dry laughter rippled through all the men and excitement could be felt in the air, "Sanosuke. Take your men to Kuge Gate to deal with those Choshu bastards."

"Sure thing, boss." Harada said with his usual lazy smile. He was leaning on his spear prior to being addressed. He stood, lifting the end of the spear from the ground.

"Saito, Yamazaki. I want you to figure out what the situation is here. You will hold Hamaguri Gate." Hijikata ordered.

"As you wish." Saito bowed his head with Yamazaki nodding to him. Hijikata turned to Kondou.

"Your job's a tough one, Chief. I want you to go talk to the Aizu bigwigs." In response, Kondou questioningly tilted his head to the side.

"Some of those bastards are headed for Ten'nou, but some of them are just gonna run around and cause trouble. If we're gonna go after them, we'll need to leave Kyoto and you're the only one who can get us those papers." Hijikata explained before turning to Inoue.

"Gen, I want you to go with him. Somebody has to keep an eye on our chief. Make sure he doesn't go crazy, alright?" Hijikata asked.

"Of course. I'll do my best, Commander." Inoue smiled as laughter ran through the soldiers again. Kondou gave Hijikata a wry grin but didn't deny he'd need to be kept from going a little crazy.

"The rest of you are coming with me to Ten'nou. As for Chizuru and Tsuyuki—" Hijikata turned to the girls.

"I'd like to help keep Hamaguri. They could possibly return." Tsuyuki spoke up. Hijikata nodded and turned to Harada.

"Take Chizuru with you. She'll help with wounded." Harada nodded and gave Chizuru a smile. Chizuru turned to Tsuyuki as they began to disperse.

"Stay safe." Chizuru lightly ordered. Tsuyuki nodded.

"Inform Harada I will slice open his stomach should he not keep an eye on you." Tsuyuki wryly demurred, "He will not survive his stomach being sliced open this time." Tsuyuki had debated on Harada's pride in his scar. Ignoring Chizuru's questioning look, Tsuyuki started to where Yamazaki, Saito and Saito's division stood.

"First we must speak with the Aizu on behalf of the Shinsengumi." Saito informed Tsuyuki.

"Of course, we had been ordered to stand with the reserves." murmured Tsuyuki, "It will be wise to smooth things over with the Aizu now rather than later."

"I can take care of that, if you want." Yamazaki offered, "I imagine recent events have thrown their commanders into confusion. They

shouldn't impede us." Saito contemplated for a moment before nodding.

"I will leave that task to you, Yamazaki. Send word for us if you encounter any difficulty." Saito allowed. Yamazaki bowed once before turning on his heel and quickly disappearing. Saito and Tsuyuki turned when shouting could be heard. Men from what looked to be Aizu, and what Tsuyuki assumed to be the Satsuma, were arguing over something. Saito and Tsuyuki walked over to investigate, careful not to tread on any of the fallen men.

"What are they possibly arguing over?" Tsuyuki grunted, annoyed at their lack of respect for their fallen comrades. Had she been a part of the fight, she'd have been mourning her fallen comrades at that moment. Saito's eyes narrowed.

"I assume over who will take credit for this battle— how petty." Saito scoffed. His words had barely finished when one of the men noticed Saito and Tsuyuki.

"Who's— wait, is this the Shinsengumi? Really? You do realize they're just a bunch of filthy peasants, right?" one of the men, who Tsuyuki decided was a Satsuma, questioned before turning back to the Satsuma men, "You hear that boys? The Aizu are too scared to come to a fight if they don't have some ronin bums to back them up!" The faces of Saito's men stiffened and most reached for their swords. Tsuyuki herself reached for her dual blades, but Saito put a hand in front of her. His face was as calm and implacable as usual.

"Ignore them. You have a job to do." Saito called back to the men, his intense blue eyes coolly sweeping over the men purposely, looking each man in the eye. Their hands dropped from their swords as they shifted uncomfortably.

"You son of a bitch! How dare you!" An Aizu soldier yelled as his face turned bright red and he pulled his sword from its scabbard, ready to fight. Before a Satsuma soldier could retort, a tall red haired man stepped through the men. Tsuyuki repressed a snarl when she saw it was the blue eyed man who had pummeled Heisuke back at the Ikeda.

"You'll face me? Then taste my steel!" The soldier threw himself forward with his yell.

'That man will easily cut him down, Heisuke is a captain and he was tossed aside like a doll at the Ikeda. This soldier has no chance.' Tsuyuki thought as she watched the soldier thrust forward, his sword prepared for a deadly cut however Saito, with speed faster than Tsuyuki had seen from most soldiers, had stopped before the charging man.

"Stop. He's far too strong for you." Saito held his hand up to the Aizu soldier who stopped before he could slice Saito.

"I apologize for the trouble we caused at the inn. I believe I had a duel with a boy named Toudou." the red haired man easily apologized, "If his injury hasn't healed yet, please tell him that I apologize for not showing more restraint." Tsuyuki was slightly surprised that the man's eyes showed sincerity in his apology. The man's eyes looked to Tsuyuki, widening almost too little for most to see.

"It was you who defeated Toudou then?" Saito's voice brought the man's eyes back to him, "Yes, I suppose that would fit." If Saito had heard the man's apology, which he undoubtedly did, he ignored it, "I imagine the Satsuma sent you to the inn as spies to learn what the Choshu were planning?" The man shrugged and tilted his head to the side quizzically. Saito took a step forward, his blade so fast Tsuyuki's eyes hardly caught the flash of silver as the blade left the scabbard. The tip of Saito's sword was hardly a hair away from the man's forehead. The man, surprisingly unperturbed, merely glanced down at Saito.

"The Shinsengumi has unfinished business with you. Not today, perhaps, but Toudou will have his revenge." Tsuyuki was surprised to hear the underlying anger in Saito's voice. She had never heard Saito to be anything but calm and collected.

"Perhaps, but I have no reason to fight the Shinsengumi today." the man replied easily, as if there was not a sword at his head. The man's easy going attitude slightly baffled Tsuyuki, he acted as if they had been having tea and not fighting. Saito didn't answer the man, his sword not moving. Tsuyuki didn't even think about the possibility of Saito killing the man. Saito was sensible and collected, she trusted him even though he was angry. Even though he was a cold man, he was concerned as this man had been the one who injured his friend. Saito was not a man who was ruled by emotions.

As if sensing Tsuyuki's trust in him, Saito's blue eyes flickered to her. He smiled briefly, and the smile lasted for long enough for Tsuyuki to realize he was actually smiling at her.

"I have no interest in escalating this situation. Our goals are the same." Saito demurred, "However we cannot overlook any further insults. If you persist, then the Aizu Domain and the Shinsengumi will have no choice but to take action." The tall red haired man simply nodded deeply.

"It is true our speech and conduct has been unbecoming. I offer my apologies on behalf of the Satsuma Domain." the man easily apologized. Again, his eyes seemed to show sincerity and peacefulness. Saito returned the man's nod and slid his sword back into its scabbard. The Satsuma men seemed to be unhappy with the way things had turned out, but whoever the tall man was they didn't dare challenge him.

'So he managed to get the Satsuma to apologize. By forcing that, he allowed the Aizu to save face and by directly confronting the issue he avoided bloodshed.' Tsuyuki respected Saito's quick thinking and intelligence.

"I also hoped to avoid conflict. I am grateful you stepped down." the man bowed deeply, and Tsuyuki debated if it would be rude to demand his name. As if sensing her thoughts, he straightened.

"My name is Amagiri Kyuji. I pray we will be able to work together when next we meet." And with his introduction finished, he slowly turned and walked through the Satsuma ranks, towering above all the other men. Tsuyuki turned to Saito, who was watching the man weave through his men.

"Saito-san, you never intended to fight him, did you." Tsuyuki didn't phrase it as a question. Saito didn't turn to her as he spoke.

"I had hoped he would back down when given a display of my iai, but it would seem he saw right through my ruse." Saito admitted. Tsuyuki had noted the man hadn't even attempted to dodge, nor had he flinched. She smirked, looking to the red hair that was now hardly visible.

"The Satsuma command some very dangerous men. If they were not men of reason as well, we would already be dead." Saito commented.

"I disagree. The Shinsengumi, you all are a force to be reckoned with." Saito eyed Tsuyuki as he turned and started back towards Hamaguri Gate to await Yamazaki's return.

"You too, are a force to be reckoned with. I am glad you ally yourself with us." Saito's compliment made Tsuyuki pause and look to him. He didn't say anything else, choosing to look away. Tsuyuki allowed a small smile to curl across her lips as she looked across the battlefield.

'Perhaps the Shinsengumi isn't bad.' Tsuyuki thought to herself as she looked up at the sky, ignoring the smell of the August heat rotting the corpses, 'I may come to like them.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN<strong>

\*\*So.\*\*

\*\*FUCK HISTORY.\*\*

\*\*How they have advanced shit will be explained later, i swear. Like, i had been praying as i googled the camera that color cameras were like, 1840s despite knowing that was not happening. Cameras were early 1800s, so, i can get away with that. There is a fucking reason they have color photos despite it being early. So, if you fucking comment on it, i will be very displeased.\*\*

\*\*I also hated googling countries to figure out where she could come from. Like, i had my first four choices. My first three were failures. Fourth one worked fine. It's a bit iffy though.  
\*\*

\*\*Thanks to the following for reviewing:

>Dragonmaster789<br>Rei-chan the Shinigami

>waistedyouth<br>unicornmeat3 \*\*

\*\*D Next chapter won't be for about a week. Vacations are fun.  
\*\*

## 5. Sorrow

\*\*\_Honor\_\*\*

## \_Chapter 5\_

### \_Sorrow\_

\* \* \*

><p>After the Hamaguri Rebellion, as the previous events had been labeled, Tsuyuki had learned from Chizuru that a man had challenged Harada at Kuge. The man, like Amagiri, had shown incredible skill. Although he had wielded a pistol rather than his fists. His name had been Shiranui Kyo, and he wasn't the one who worried Tsuyuki the most. The one who worried her the most was the one who had managed to disarm Hijikata on the way to Mount Ten'nou. This man was Kazama Chikage, and the name was familiar to Tsuyuki. The familiarity of the name bothered Tsuyuki for the upcoming months.<p>

One morning in February, Tsuyuki found herself and Chizuru bringing the tray of tea to the common room. Tsuyuki felt the task to be demeaning, but happened to be as graceful as a geisha when serving the tea to the men. Tsuyuki felt that the year they had been with the Shinsengumi had been worth their time. They searched for Chizuru's father often, and Tsuyuki felt more relaxed, not having to be on constant watch. However she still stayed tense around the men. Her trust in them had risen, but not enough to the point she would speak about herself.

Tsuyuki took her normal place between Okita and Saito, sipping her tea. The warm tea helped warm her hands against the chill in the air that the snow outside had caused. Chizuru had taken note of Tsuyuki's love for the snow, and Saito surprisingly had also enjoyed watching the snow fall with Tsuyuki.

"The Yagi have been good to us so far, but this place is getting crowded." Hijikata announced through their tea. Tsuyuki eyed Hijikata. She agreed, more than once when she had been attempting to find a place to train with her staff she had been walked in on by soldiers.

"True, it is getting a little small, especially with all the new guys coming inâ€¦" Shinpachi voiced his agreement.

"You'll be getting more soon, right?" Chizuru added curiously. At that moment, Shinpachi and Harada were quieter than usual due to the fact Heisuke had gone to Edo to recruit more men. Tsuyuki admittedly missed the banter at meals. Tsuyuki began to listen half heartedly to the captains speak about finding new arrangements, instead choosing to open the letter she had received from Isolde that morning. She was disturbed though when Okita started laughing once she had managed to open the delicate paper.

"Ahahaha! They aren't gonna like that very much." Okita burst out. Tsuyuki gave him an annoyed look that he ignored in favor of adding to his laughter, "You're thinking we'll just force our way in? Guess I wouldn't expect anything less from you, Hijikata."

"It's pretty big, I'll give you that. But I really don't think the monks are going to take to a bunch of soldiers living in their temple." Harada pointed out. Tsuyuki sipped her tea, eyeing her letter again. She had wanted to read it, but she couldn't block out

the loud voices of the captains, "Though the location's great. We'll be able to get out into the city a lot quicker than from out here in Mibu."

"Would they really not want us there?" Chizuru innocently inquired. Saito shrugged at her.

"The Nishi Kongwanji temple has been cooperating with the Choshu. Some of their ronin have stayed there." Saito answered. Tsuyuki looked up.

"Would it not benefit us to stay there then? To add to the larger space, we would also be keeping Choshu from having another shelter to hide their agents." Tsuyuki gained a pensive look for a moment, "Are the monks here as viciously dedicated to their practices? I recall a priest attempting to have me burned at the stake for being an incarnation of the devil due to my eye color back in England." Shinpachi sputtered and attempted to poorly conceal his laughter. Saito continued on as if Shinpachi was not laughing at Tsuyuki, who looked as if she was debating the temple was in fact a good idea.

"No doubt they will be less than receptive to our overtures. On the other hand, Tsuyuki-san's point is valid." Saito supplied. Sanan, who had been quietly sipping his tea, suddenly put his cup down and glared as if insulted.

"You don't think it somewhat uncouth to use force against men of the cloth?" Sanan asked, looking as if he had a foul taste in his mouth.

"Choshu have used the temple to hide their men, and they couldn't have done that without the help of the monks." Hijikata retorted, voice level and cold as steel.

"I agree the Choshu must be dealt with, but this seems—" Sanan trailed off, knowing he wouldn't win this argument.

"I agree with Toshi, but I have to concede that Sanan has a point." Kondou entered the conversation after putting his own empty cup down gently.

"Impressive as always, Chief Kondou. Only a man with a truly open mind can be so considerate of both his allies and his enemies." a dark haired man with narrow eyes demurred. This man was Itou Kashitaro, the new deputy commander who had joined the Shinsengumi in the fall. Tsuyuki had found she greatly disliked this man, he reminded her of a snake. Her dislike had been from the start, but she truly hated him after an encounter on one of his first days.

She and Chizuru had been tasked with collecting the empty sake bottles and bringing the next sake to the conference room where Hijikata, Itou, Kondou and Sanan were speaking to one another. Tsuyuki had been less than pleased to be delivering sake to the man, and hadn't gone when Chizuru had set the sake out before Itou had entered. But rather than Chizuru, who would have gone to collect the empty bottles, Tsuyuki had offered.

'I don't want that snake near Chizuru, he has a look that I do not like.' Tsuyuki thought as she announced her entrance. She entered the

room with her head bowed. Itou immediately turned and eyed Tsuyuki as she announced she was collecting the empty sake bottles. Unlike Chizuru, who donned clothing made for cleaning and serving, Tsuyuki had refused to remove her warrior clothing. She had allowed the removal of her shirt and hakama, but left the open yukata and her corset. As Tsuyuki was a skilled warrior, Hijikata grudgingly allowed her to strut around without the layers hiding her gender. Unlike Chizuru, Tsuyuki had a developed womanly figure that was no doubt toned from her training.

Tsuyuki had sent Chizuru back to their room, albeit forcefully when Chizuru wanted to help Tsuyuki clean the sake bottles. Tsuyuki had almost snarled at her, and Chizuru saw there was no room for argument so she had given up and returned to their room. In the dark night as she cleaned the sake bottles, Tsuyuki heard Itou approaching far before he had said anything. She merely turned to look at him when he finally announced his presence.

"Hey, you there." Tsuyuki stood to be almost eye level with Itou.

"May I help you?" she asked, tone collected and cool.

"What is someone like you doing here? I saw another who didn't belong when they dropped off the sake. You're a woman, why do you hold weapons?" Itou advanced on Tsuyuki, slightly frowning when she didn't back down.

"I am a warrior; I have mastered the art of wielding dual blades, as well as my own unique staff. I would rather you not refer to me as a woman, I am a warrior before I am a woman. Treat me as any of your men." Tsuyuki's hands rested on her dual blades, which didn't go unnoticed by Itou.

"Is there a reason you are with the men? Are you perhapsâ€¦" Itou trailed off. Tsuyuki stiffened when he discreetly looked her over. She was hoping he was sizing her up as a warrior, but as she wasn't stupid, she doubted so. She had forgotten that men who believed they had power due to politics were general assholes. She also forgot what it had felt to be a woman to be these men.

'Bastardâ€¦' I am not a woman; I am a warrior before I am a woman.'

"If you are suggesting what I feel you are suggesting, then you had best leave. I have no intentions of starting a fight, but I will happily slice your head off before that fight begins." Tsuyuki idly threatened as she turned back to the sake bottles. She heard him begin to move, and she easily pulled her staff from her back in one fluid motion and caught Itou's blade in one of the grooves.

"A fine staff, but how could you fight with such a weapon?" Itou marveled, tilting his head to the side. Tsuyuki felt her head start to spin. She absolutely hated politics. It required more cunning words than she was willing to speak. The trickery however, came to her with ease.

"Ask any of the captains, they can tell you how this staff has single handedly helped me bring down two dozen men on my own." Tsuyuki's eyes narrowed in a challenge. Itou seemed to weigh his options before



he pulled back his sword and sheathed it back in its scabbard.

"It's been a pleasure to make your acquaintance. It's rude not to introduce oneself, you already know my name I presume." Itou's eyes challenged Tsuyuki in an all new challenge. Her lips curled into a smirk that could pass as an evil smile.

"My name is Tsuyuki, but you may call me Tsuyuki-san, kodomo." Itou's eyes widened at the insult as Tsuyuki turned on her heel, lifted the bucket of sake bottles, and stalked past him. She paused at the hallway and looked over her shoulder.

"Should you start something, I always finish what I get involved with." and then Tsuyuki left him. She stalked past Okita, who had obviously been listening in and debating if he should jump in.

"Not many delicate flowers, hm Tsuyuki?" Okita called. Tsuyuki looked over her shoulder at Okita.

"The thorns protect the delicate flowers, Okita-san." she demurred before continuing down the hall, ignoring Okita's snickers.

That had been months prior, and she had challenged Itou in every advance he made towards either she or Chizuru. When questioned on her visible distaste for the man by Saito one morning when sparring, she had curled her lips up in distaste.

"That man is a parasite," she spat as she ducked under a swipe from Saito's blade, "I suspected him to be a man of honor, as the Shinsengumi are. I was terribly wrong to think so. Political figureheads are cockroaches."

"He looks down on others." agreed Saito calmly as Tsuyuki's staff flew over his head. She hadn't pulled any of the blades out in her spar; however she was planning on unchaining it during the fight at some point.

"His attitude is worthy of the uppity snobs in England. He casually prods at tempers, acts as if insulting others is an accident and knows that we cannot afford to lose him at this moment." Tsuyuki added as she kicked out, catching Saito's blade's handle and knocking the sword from his hand. Saito watched his blade land in the dirt a few feet away. Tsuyuki turned to look at it as she leaned on her staff.

"I wish to be the one who kills him when the time comes." Tsuyuki commented casually, as if they were having tea.

"You may need to deter Souji." Saito remarked blandly as he retrieved his blade.

"Perhaps." Tsuyuki let a small smile slip from her mouth as she broke her staff into the halves, the chain spilling out onto the floor.

Tsuyuki was pulled from her reverie when around her the room suddenly became tense. She also tensed, catching the end of Itou's words.

"-left arm is utterly useless?" Any possible warmth had left the

room, and Tsuyuki casually rested her hand on her left blade. Itou had his usual haughty air surrounding him as he casually spoke, "Of course, you needn't be useless, even if you can no longer serve as a soldier. I'm sure that your wit and foresight will continue to be a great asset to the Shinsengumi and myself." Tsuyuki frowned at the insult. Sanan was ghastly white and Tsuyuki compared this look to when someone was stunned by a punch to the solar plexus. All around the room, the captains looked enraged. Even Tsuyuki's face was paler than normal from anger.

"Perhaps I didn't hear you right, Itou-san." Hijikata stated, purple eyes narrowed. His voice was as cold and sharp as a blade, "Sanan's smart, like you said. But more than that, he's a swordsman of the Shinsengumi. He is not useless, and he is not replaceable!" Hijikata ended in a snarl. Sanan didn't look reassured as he looked back down at his arm.

"But my arm isâ€¦" Sanan couldn't bring himself to finish his sentence.

"Oh dear, that was terribly rude of me. Truly, there could be no better news than hearing that your arm has healed." Itou smiled, but his fake smile fooled no one. Tsuyuki's lips curled upward into a grimace as she remembered the nobles in England.

Tsuyuki looked in Hijikata's direction, and Chizuru looked over at him in slight concern. Both had heard him swear under his breath, however Tsuyuki was across the room.

"Ahâ€¦ umâ€¦ Itou-san." Kondou carefully began, "Ifâ€¦ if you would care to, perhaps you might come and have a look at our training regimen?" Itou's eyes narrowed at the obvious attempt in changing subject, but his lips curled into a smile as he let it slide.

"Myâ€¦ how thoughtful of you. Yes, of course, I would love to have a look!" Itou seemed to turn to himself as he began to lighten his tone in a small monologue. Kondou and Itou left the room, chatting as if nothing had gone wrong. After they were surely gone, all eyes turned towards Sanan.

"Sanan, don't listen to that asshole, okay?" Shinpachi ordered tensely. Sanan didn't say anything. He only stood and left the room, silent as a dead man.

'Perhapsâ€¦' Tsuyuki thought as she sipped her tea, 'The loss of his arm is equal to that of death.'

"Man, I feel bad for himâ€¦ even the men are avoiding him these days." Harada sighed as he leaned back and looked at the ceiling with a troubled look.

"Well, he's kinda been a jerk lately. I imagine that's why." pointed out Shinpachi. Shinpachi shook his head and eyed Chizuru and Tsuyuki, "He wasn't always like that, you know. Back in the day he was always acting like he was looking out for everybody."

"Yah, he was real nice. At least on the surfaceâ€¦ nothing left of that now." muttered Harada.

"Do you really mean that?" whispered Chizuru.

"What the hell does Kondou see in that Itou guy?" Okita's loud demand caught everyone's attention. He had been speaking with Hijikata, but his voice had caught the room's attention.

"How the hell would I know? Probably just pulled the wool over Kondou's eyes with some well spoken bullshit." Hijikata retorted.

"That's all politics is," Tsuyuki spoke up in her usual monotone, "It's a contest to see who can bullshit the best and get away with it. In England, whoever could find the best bullshit fastest and please the best of the best got away with everything. When you have money, power and intelligence you can accomplish anything."

"Why don't you just get rid of him, Hijikata? Tell him the Shinsengumi doesn't need him." Okita looked from Tsuyuki to Hijikata as he spoke. Hijikata just sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"No way Kondou'll go for that. He adores Itou." Hijikata almost moaned. Tsuyuki.

"Itou is a snake. He thinks he's big and tough, and knows that we can't do anything while he sweet talks Kondou-san and wraps him around his finger." Tsuyuki clarified.

"Besides, when he joined he brought a bunch of men with him. You think they won't make a scene if we kick him out?" Hijikata added in frustration. Okita scowled viciously.

"Well damn. Aren't you supposed to be the demon? The commander from hell? You're supposed to make the impossible happen!" Okita huffed.

"Fine Souji. How about we make you commander. Then you can kick out Itou and his guys." Hijikata demurred. Okita snorted.

"Ha! Hell no! That's way too much trouble." Okita waved it off and laughed. But after his laugh died his grin slid from his face and he sighed.

"Do you dislike Itou too, Saito-san?" Chizuru inquired to the indigo haired man. Saito looked at her for a moment.

"As an organization grows, it will expand to include people who have differing ideas and points of view." Saito paused for a moment, "However, if one attempts to force this sort of diversity, then the organization will begin to rot from within." Saito's words hung in the air darkly, and the conversation in the room died from there.

Later that night, Tsuyuki found herself heading towards the spring to bathe. However, as she passed by the Yagi house, a noise caught her attention. Tsuyuki slid into the shadows, sidling down the hallway as she made her way toward the common room. She slid the door open slightly to see, frowning when she saw Sanan inside. As the door slid open, Sanan turned.

"I never thought both of you would catch me. How unexpected." Tsuyuki

stepped inside, frowning when she saw Chizuru attempting to blend in with the shadows. Tsuyuki had thought Chizuru was back in their room. She was evidently wrong.

Tsuyuki tensed when she looked over Sanan. His face was calm and peaceful, a drastic change from his attitude lately. His face was too peaceful, something had to be wrong. Tsuyuki's hand rested on her left blade, ready to draw if needed.

"S-Sanan?" Chizuru whispered as he moved. Light glinted off a small vial in his hand. Tsuyuki eyed it. The vial was small; it would easily fit in the palm of a man's hand. It had a red liquid inside that reminded Tsuyuki of blood. But she couldn't smell the tangy iron in the air. The air smelled slightly of diluted chemicals and the remnants of the smell of their dinner, rice and fish.

"You're wondering about this, I imagine?" Sanan held the bottle up, "This is a secret treatment developed by your father, Kodo-san, Chizuru, under orders from the shogunate." Tsuyuki began to slowly slide towards Chizuru, ready to leap in front of her to block her from any attacks that Sanan could make. Tsuyuki half listened to Sanan's words as he described the contents of the vial. How it originated in the west, and how the contents could transform a person completely. How it would make a person stronger and make them heal at inhuman speeds.

"There is, however, a rather serious flaw." Sanan eyed the bottle in annoyance. His smile hardly twisted though, "It wasâ€¦ I suppose you could say it was too strong."

"It caused humans to go mad." surmised Tsuyuki as she reached Chizuru's side. Her red eyes glinted dangerously in the moonlight, "Am I right to assume the twoâ€¦ inhuman creatures I cut down that night we came upon the Shinsengumi were men who took this?" At Sanan's slow nod, her eyes flickered to the bottle. She took a slightly deep breath.

'So this is what caused those two men to have demonic strengthâ€¦' Tsuyuki's eyes hardened when Sanan spoke again.

"I see you understand Tsuyukiâ€¦ your eyes hold wisdom beyond your years. You look at this bottle with reservation. You fear this bottle." Sanan tilted his head to the side. Tsuyuki nearly snorted, but she held in the urge to.

"I do not fear anything. You would do well not to mess with the minds of a human. Am I right to assume the trigger to insanity would be blood? I recall the inhuman creatures seeking my blood as they attacked." Tsuyuki guarded her emotions, not letting anything forth. Sanan nodded again, pleased she was catching on brilliantly.

"How can they be of use in battle like this? No matter how powerful or unkillable they are, if they lose control at blood they could attack both enemy and ally." Sanan mused, "Kodo-san conducted experiments on the Corps during the development of his treatment. Unfortunately, when he disappeared his research was put on hold." Chizuru attempted to speak, however she seemed to be at a loss. Big, glossy eyes looked to Tsuyuki, pleading for her to do something to end the nightmare.

"You have been conducting your own research, haven't you? The chemical smell in the airâ€¦ you've diluted it. I normally would not notice, however now that I'm grasping for answers, it makes sense. You spent all your free time researching. You want to use this to heal your arm. However, you don't want it to drive you mad. Your theory is that if you dilute the chemicals as much as possible then the effect of it wouldn't be as taxing." Tsuyuki demurred. Tsuyuki knew she was right when Sanan's smile broadened. He shook the vial gently, the contents swishing from side to side.

"Will you be okay if you drink that?" Chizuru inquired meekly. Tsuyuki sent her a sharp look.

"I highly doubt you will receive the results you are looking for. Diluting it may have reduced the chances of going mad, however it also reduces the chances of giving strength and regeneration. You'd best leave it alone, Sanan-san. Humans were not meant to have that power." Tsuyuki told him. Sanan either didn't hear or didn't care for Tsuyuki's words. He looked to Chizuru instead.

"I haven't tested it; I haven't the faintest idea what it would do to me. I could die, but what is my life if I can no longer wield my sword?" Sanan looked utterly depressed. Tsuyuki's lips curled into a sneer. She wouldn't give him pity. Her pity had been all given a long time before. Chizuru started to yell at Sanan, convincing him to not take the vial and that everyone liked him. Sanan yelled back, and Tsuyuki had enough.

"Sanan-san, give me the vial." Tsuyuki ordered seriously, her left hand stretched out with her palm up. Sanan's eyes softened when he looked from Chizuru, who was fighting back tears, to Tsuyuki.

"â€¦let me die as a person as well." he whispered before popping the tiny top off the vial. Tsuyuki dove forward to grab the bottle, but even with her speed she couldn't grab it before he had tilted his head back and dumped the liquid into his mouth. A single drop trickled from the corner of his mouth as everything in the room came to a halt. Chizuru's hands covered her mouth in surprise, her eyes wide and sparkling with tears. Tsuyuki was in a guarded stance, one sword already withdrawn from its scabbard. Tsuyuki heard the sound of a single heartbeat that seemed to almost shake the room before the vial slipped through Sanan's snow white hands and shattered upon hitting the floor. Sanan collapsed into a heap following the vial's shattering. Tsuyuki threw a hand out to block Chizuru when she attempted to rush forward to Sanan.

"â€¦Tsuyuki-kun?" Chizuru gasped as Sanan's crumbled form twitched, "â€¦Sanan?" Sanan's fallen form groaned in pure agony as his hand gripped at his chest where his heart was.

Without warning Sanan's arm whipped out and caught Tsuyuki's legs. She was thrown to the side, however she rebounded off the wall and landed on her feet with a serious expression. Tsuyuki dove forward, and Chizuru nearly screamed when Tsuyuki's blade saved her from Sanan leaping towards her exposed throat.

"Chizuru, run! Run to our room and pretend you never saw this!" hissed Tsuyuki, "Should a captain walk in right now, no doubt they will kill us for what we've learned. Pretend you haven't seen this!"

Chizuru went to protest, but did as told when she saw the dead serious glint in Tsuyuki's crimson eyes. As she rushed from the room as quietly as possible, she heard the eerie, insane laughter that was so similar to the first two men they had met bubble from Sanan's throat.

"Eh heâ€| he he he." Sanan tried to knock Tsuyuki's sword from her hand, but she stood strong against the blow. Tsuyuki watched as Sanan's brown hair slowly began to fade to a bright white that rivaled her own hair color. His eyes began to shine a brilliant scarlet that reflected Tsuyuki's own crimson pools. Soon, Sanan's face that was twisted with madness was framed by pure white hair while demon eyes glinted from the shadows of his face.

"Sanan-san, regain your senses. Bloodlust is not necessary." Tsuyuki ordered, ducking under a swipe aimed for her head. She thrust her elbow into his solar plexus before wrapping her arm around his neck in a tight choke hold. She slammed her chambered knee into his abdomen as he scratched at her arms. He gasped for air and his resisting subsided. Wheeling back out of Tsuyuki's grip Sanan grabbed at his face before letting out an animalistic scream of raw pain.

"I seeâ€| I've failed thenâ€|" Sanan gasped out as sanity poked through his eyes. Tsuyuki eyed Sanan as he lifted his gaze to meet hers.

"Tsuyuki, kill me. While you still can." Sanan pleaded. Tsuyuki looked down at Sanan as he sunk to his knees while cradling his head. Then, with slow deliberate moments, she slid her sword into its scabbard.

"Bloodlust is easily overcome. I am a warrior from the west; I crave blood in my battles. There is no honor in my fights. I can overcome my bloodlust should I need to, you shall overcome yours." Tsuyuki stepped back when Sanan tried to reach for her swords. Sanan fell to his stomach, his voice a low growl. Tsuyuki didn't bother trying to translate his grunts and snarls.

"A blade to the heartâ€|" he whispered as he tried to crawl towards her again, "Let meâ€| die." Tsuyuki didn't give in to his begging. She stood above him, looking down at his pathetic form. Then, with a sudden agonized cry he back pedaled away from Tsuyuki while gripping his head. He tried to stand, but in a sudden motion he collapsed to the ground, unmoving once more.

In the silence, Tsuyuki put her back to the wall and slid down. Her eyes observed Sanan's fallen form and the shattered vial on the ground. Then, her eyes trailed to her arms. The little red lines Sanan's nails had left were closing before her eyes. The skin slowly knit together and she was left with her arms bare and unharmed. She sighed and looked up at the ceiling when she heard the door slid open with a loud thwack. Tsuyuki eyed Okita as he stormed into the room. His eyes slid from Sanan to Tsuyuki, who merely closed her eyes.

'It seems that I should be worrying. I had thought that they had sniffed out all of these so called medicines back in the west. No matter, my biggest worry should be whether I have to kill the Shinsengumi if they try to kill me for knowing too much.' Tsuyuki watched Okita hurry over to Sanan's form. He muttered to her about how Sanan probably passed out because of the pain and strain it took

on the body, and that the real painful part had yet to come. Okita had lifted Sanan after a moment and hurried out as several of the captains entered the room in a flurry of loud voices.

'How unfortunate this situation seems to be.' demurred Tsuyuki as she caught eyes with Saito, 'Perhaps I can salvage it.'

The rest of the night was a sleepless night for Tsuyuki. She was kept in the common room with two captains that shifted every quarter of an hour. She didn't sleep, and neither did her two guards for that time. They wouldn't speak, only staring at each other. The coldness in the room put Tsuyuki on guard. They hadn't bothered to remove her swords or staff from her person yet. They surely knew she wouldn't take well to that. Finally, after an hour and a half, the captains all met in the common room.

The room was still in a tense silence. Tsuyuki hadn't moved from her position at all, and the captains each took their usual spot for meals. They murmured to each other about what had occurred. They spoke in low tones that Tsuyuki shouldn't have been able to hear. But she could. She already knew what they spoke of though. Finally, Tsuyuki decided to input herself into the conversation.

'I've decided knowledge is the best path to follow for now.' Tsuyuki decided as she cleared her throat. All the captains turned to her, the room falling to a deafening silence.

"To think, that the remnants of that atrocious substance has found its way to here of all places." Tsuyuki drawled. She received confused, cold looks, "Surely you're aware the origin of that substance is in the west?"

"You're saying you know what it is?" Hijikata demanded. Tsuyuki smirked, a sight that sent chills down the captain's backs.

"Vaguely. I don't know what you all call it, but where I'm from it was called Demon's Blood. A secret group was put together to put an end to the drug, and once it was abolished the select few who knew of it, save for those who got away, were killed so the drug would not be recreated. I had no part in the drug. I saw the results of it though. When I came across the two in the alley when we met you three," Tsuyuki nodded to Hijikata, Okita and Saito, "I didn't think anything of it. I was surprised to find creatures that weren't downed by my blade in a fatal cut. I didn't know what it was until tonight, when Sanan explained everything. I put most of it together, it wasn't hard. For a secret, it's poorly kept." explained Tsuyuki. She eyed each of the captains.

"Were you subjected to the drug?" Saito's question shocked Tsuyuki, but then she recalled her similar looks to the creatures. She didn't show her surprise, only shaking her head.

"No, I was born with these looks. You saw the photograph of me as a child. What you've seen so far of my skill has been the result of intense training, not cheating." Tsuyuki elaborated. She paused for a moment. She actually felt considerably insulted. She wasn't the most honorable woman, however she didn't cheat. And accusing her of using the drug, that was like saying her skills weren't skill at all and were merely illusion, "Now, the question remains of what to do

now."

"As much as we want to kill you, you're actually an asset." admitted Harada after sharing a look with Shinpachi.

"We won't kill you, or Chizuru, yet. But you will not breathe a word of this to anyone." Hijikata ordered. Tsuyuki's lips turned up into a smirk.

"And what of Chizuru-san? Will she be informed of this occurrence?" inquired Tsuyuki.

"There is no need." Saito interrupted, calmly and smoothly as he gestured to the door. Tsuyuki turned her head, eyes narrowing when she spotted wide brown eyes looking through a crack in the door.

"Chizuru-san, it is impolite to eavesdrop and be found doing so." Tsuyuki reprimanded. Shinpachi let out a snort despite the tense atmosphere.

"So you're saying its fine to eavesdrop if you don't get caught?" he asked. Tsuyuki nodded.

"You can find valuable information for free that way." she clarified, "So long as you aren't caught; only you will know of the eavesdropping. You deserve to be punished if you are caught."

"How much did you hear?" Hijikata demanded.

"All of it, I'veâ€| been here for awhileâ€|" she awkwardly shifted as she slid into the room and knelt next to Tsuyuki.

"We're going to be clear on this, you two, even if you could be useful, if you two do anything weird, we'll kill you." Hijikata clarified briskly, his cold eyes not leaving Chizuru.

"I thought we already spoke of this. We won't breathe a word of what has occurred, I see no reason to. In all honesty, I find your drug to be a useless failure." Tsuyuki stood and headed towards the door.

"Kondou, go check on Sanan. Okita is there with him now." ordered Hijikata before turning back to the captains, "Don't let anyone near Sanan's room. Especially Itou's men." Tsuyuki, as she slid the door open, had to agree with Hijikata on that. Itou could not find out about this incident.

"Shinpachi, go check on the Maekawa house." Shinpachi nodded at his order. As he passed Chizuru and shouldered past Tsuyuki, Chizuru could feel a similar hostility to when they had first arrived.

'It seems, that despite being here for so long, we still haven't gone anywhere in their eyesâ€|' Chizuru bit her lip at the thought as Hijikata barked more orders. Saito was given the inner courtyard to watch for Itou's men and Harada was to go keep an eye on the rest of the men.

"Tsuyuki, go with Saito. Chizuru, with Harada." Tsuyuki, stood in the doorway and waited for Saito. She politely nodded to him and they



made their way to the inner courtyard. Chizuru gave Tsuyuki a nervous look as she and Harada headed the other way.

'I suppose, I trust Harada-san the most with Chizuru-san.' Tsuyuki thought to herself as she and Saito reached the inner courtyard.

"I didn't notice how bad it was for him," Saito mumbled. Tsuyuki's ears twitched, and she didn't comment. The words were not meant for her, "No doubt we were continuing our research with the hope of giving him back his arm, but—" In the cold night, Tsuyuki watched as the white clouds from their breath rose into the air. She didn't find the silence between Saito and herself to be awkward, it was more tranquil.

"To think, that this is where we should end up—" Saito murmured. Tsuyuki saw right through his calm façade, his blue eyes were troubled.

"What will we do about tonight's occurrence with Sanan-san?" questioned Tsuyuki. The atmosphere tensed, but only slightly.

"A captain of the Shinsengumi could not be of the corps. It is best he dies." Saito admitted, though his voice showed he wasn't pleased.

"Would you kill your own comrade, if you had to?" inquired Tsuyuki. Saito looked to her, and he found her crimson eyes swirling in emotion. He didn't comment on her moment of weakness, instead, he answered her question.

"If I am called to, then I will kill who I must. It is as simple as that." Saito told her simply. Tsuyuki nodded, expecting and accepting that answer.

"However," he continued, surprising Tsuyuki, "I would prefer not to kill my comrades. If at all possible. It is—it is difficult to imagine something more painful." Tsuyuki nodded, and she looked up into the night sky.

"I had to kill someone dear to me, before." Tsuyuki admitted as she looked up into the sky, "I had been weak. We were attacked, and I had defended myself but could not defend for him as well. We got away, but his injuries were severe and they had dogs that were following our scent. I killed him, so that he would not undergo the torture that followed for me."

"Do you regret your decision?" Saito questioned. His blue eyes showed the slightest bit of sympathy, but it was so little that Tsuyuki hardly saw it.

"I will always regret his death, but should I be put back in that position ever again, I would do the same thing. I would rather myself be tortured than for my comrade to suffer." Tsuyuki took a deep breath of the crisp, cool air, "However now I am stronger. I will not allow another loved one to suffer as he did." Saito looked to Tsuyuki and in the deep moonlight, her hair and pale skin seemed to glow with radiant light. Her crimson pools seemed to radiate passion and resolution. But deep in those eyes, he found something else.

He found sorrow.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN<strong>

\*\*I live.\*\*

\*\*Woo.\*\*

\*\*I did not look this over yet, i was being lazy. if there's an error, or its shit, i'll look it over when i'm not crying because i have to do my AP Summer homework.\*\*

\*\*Thanks to the following for reviewing:

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End  
file.